





Social and economic impacts of increasing early marriages during the Covid-19 pandemic: A study in Mandailing Natal and South Tapanuli districts

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ABSTRACT

Introduction

Since the Covid-19 outbreak, underage marriages have become increasingly widespread with all its impact to the society. There are very limited studies on its impact from social and economic aspect, especially among Muslim society in Indonesia.

Objectives

The purpose of this study was to analyse the social and economic impacts of increasing underage marriage during the Covid-19 pandemic. By doing so, the study also aims to provide solution to solve the impacts for the affected communities.

Method

This study uses a qualitative method with a sociological approach that focuses on experiences and socio-cultural phenomena that occur in the midst of society.

Results

There are several social impacts that occur as a result of early marriage, conflict in the family, regret and heavy pressure, loss of opportunity to continue education, not being able to socialize, domestic violence, divorce. The economic impacts that occur due to early marriage, among others, are limited opportunities to get work opportunities, unable to bear the family's economic burden, structural poverty.

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Implications

Originality/Novelty

Efforts were made to reduce the number of early marriages, among others, holding meetings several times a month, formally coordinating community leaders, village officials, and KUA, through outreach programs to Majlis Taklim, marriage advice, through marriage sermons, coordinating with sub-districts, youth activities related to early marriage.

The findings of this study contributes to efforts to overcome social and economic problems among Muslim society impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

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INTRODUCTION

Since the initial outbreak of COVID-19 in Wuhan, China, the world has undergone significant social, economic, and political changes. This study explores the repercussions of the pandemic in Indonesia, particularly its impact on early marriages. The declaration of the COVID-19 entry in Indonesia began in March 2020, leading to unforeseen consequences, notably an increase in underage marriages. According to UNICEF data for 2020, Indonesia ranks as the second country with the highest number of early marriages in Southeast Asia after Cambodia (Andina, 2021; Buwono, 2019; Hasudungan, 2022). Earlier research by UNICEF in 2002 revealed that 11% of children aged 15 and 35% of those around 18 were married. In 2014, the BKKBN found that 46% or 2.5 million marriages annually in Indonesia involved brides aged 15 to 19, with 15% being underage (Salmah, 2016).

However, since the onset of COVID-19, early marriages have surged (Syalis & Nurwati, 2020), particularly evident in regions like West Java, where it is most prevalent (Kasih, 2020). The Directorate General of Religious Courts reported that from January to June 2020, 34,000 marriage dispensation applications were received, with 60% involving children under 18 (Jayani, 2021). Even in remote areas like Mandailing Natal and South Tapanuli, there has been a spike in early marriages, attributed in part to the extended period of online learning due to the pandemic. The principal of SMA 1 Panyabungan stated that many of his students decided to have early marriages because of the length of online learning due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Based on interviews with the school principal, there were 27 students who quit and were suspected of getting married (Lubis, 2021).

Apart from that, based on pre-research studies carried out in schools and related institutions, data was obtained on early marriages that occurred due to Covid-19. Among the statements from the Deputy Principal of SMK Negeri 1 Panyabungan , there were 14 female students who quit and married early and 8 students who got married and went abroad because they were bored with the COVID-19 conditions. According

to the data that researchers obtained from the Mandailing Natal Religious Court from 23 sub-districts in Mandailing Natal district during the period 2020-2021, there were 100 applicants who requested marriage dispensation because they were underage or because of other problems. Of the 23 sub-districts, there are 29 people who are underage married in Panyabungan sub-district and 13 people in Panyabungan subdistrict. Siabu, 6 North Panyabungan, 7 West Panyabungan, 8 South Panyabungan, and 4 Bukit Malintang District.

In South Tapanuli, which consists of 14 sub-districts, according to temporary data obtained from the Religious Court (PA), there were 17 couples who requested marriage dispensation because they were married underage during the COVID-19 period. In Sayur Matinggi sub-district, there are 2 dispensation applicants; in Stem Angkola subdistrict, there are 3 dispensation applicants; in Angkola Muara Tais sub-district, there are 4 dispensation applicants; in East Angkola sub-district, there are 3 dispensation applicants; and in Sipirok sub-district, there are 5 dispensation applicants. And there are several applicants in other sub-districts that we did not mention in this proposal.

Based on preliminary data that researchers obtained from the religious courts, there are several sub-districts with the highest number of perpetrators of early marriage; for example, in Mandailing Natal Regency, it is in the sub-district. Panyabungan, Siabu, South Panyabungan subdistrict, West Panyabungan subdistrict, North Panyabungan , and Bukit Malintang subdistrict, with 67 people entering early marriage. Therefore, researchers used these areas as research samples. Meanwhile, in South Tapanuli Regency, there are 14 sub-districts. Of the 14 sub-districts used as research samples, there were 5 sub-districts, namely Sipirok , Batang Angkola , and Sayur Matinggi sub-districts, Batang Angkola Muara Tais, and Angkola Timur, with a total of 60 people committing early marriage.

Many early marriages during the Covid-19 pandemic occurred due to several factors (Ismiati et al., 2022). A study reveals some factors, including the promiscuity factor, which led to pregnancy out of wedlock, the lack of interaction and attention from parents, and government and school policy factors that implemented very long distance learning. long time and the factor of being too free to use gadgets (Nikmah, 2021). Another study found that early marriage during the COVID period increased to reach 175 perpetrators in 2020. This phenomenon often occurs due to accidents in relationships (pregnancy outside of marriage) (Saputra et al., 2021).

The impact of early marriage can be seen from various perspectives, for example, in terms of health, culture, social, economic, educational, religious, and even political (Abubakar, 2019; Agustin et al., 2021; Bhattarai et al., 2022; Talukder et al., 2020; Wahhai, 2020; Walker, 2012; Zulfa et al., 2024). However, the current study focuses on the impact from a socio-economic perspective for it will be related to the nation's progress. The future of the nation and state can be influenced by the smallest community, namely the family and the children born to that family. The study limits the consideration of the geographic area that would be the research location to find out more about the impact that would occur on the increase in early marriage during the Covid-19

pandemic. Therefore, the research area determined was Mandailing Natal and South Tapanuli districts.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative methodology, grounded in several considerations, to delve into the complexities surrounding the meaning, motives, reasons, and objectives associated with early marriages. Given the intricate nature of social life that cannot be conveniently addressed in isolation, this type of research is deemed suitable. The chosen approach is sociological, aimed at revealing the meanings and socio-cultural experiences of research subjects regarding the phenomenon of early marriages in society.

The sociological legal research approach treats law as a social phenomenon, emphasizing its interconnectedness with broader societal dynamics. Data processing and analysis in legal research, using a sociological approach, adhere to methods derived from the social sciences. The analysis employed depends on the nature of the data collected. In instances where the data is monographic or in the form of cases, defying easy classification, qualitative analysis is applied. Given that the data in this research is based on cases closely intertwined with social, cultural, religious, and economic factors, the sociological approach is considered apt.

The selection of the research location stems from preliminary data indicating a prevalence of early marriage cases in Mandailing Natal and South Tapanuli districts. This includes both registered cases with marriage dispensations and unregistered marriages. According to data obtained from the Mandailing Natal Religious Court covering 23 sub-districts during 2020–2021, 100 applicants sought marriage dispensation due to underage marriages or other issues. However, a significant number of cases involve unregistered marriages, suggesting a gap between legal requirements and societal practices. A parallel situation is observed in South Tapanuli district, where 60 early marriage cases applied for dispensation, alongside a notable number engaging in private, unregistered marriages. This research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the socio-legal landscape surrounding early marriages in these districts, shedding light on the complex interplay of legal, cultural, and social factors.

RESULTS

In this research, several figures were used as informants, including the chair of the religious court, the judge of the religious court, who is in charge of juvenile justice, the clerk of the religious court to find out the number of people who applied for dispensation, and several heads of the office of religious affairs (*Kantor Urusan Agama* abbreviated KAU in Bahasa Indonesia) to confirm facts in the field based on initial data that had been obtained from the religious court. The results of the interviews we obtained at the research location can be described as follows. Chairman of the Mandailing Natal Religious Court, Hasanuddin, stated:

"During the Covid-19 period, there were many early marriages in the Mandailing Natal district. Based on the number of people who applied for marriage dispensation, it almost increased by around 75% from the previous year, when around 30 people applied for dispensation. Meanwhile, during Covid-19, this increased to 100 people for various reasons."

This research also obtained additional data from the Secretary of the Mandailing Natal Religious Court, who said:

"During this Covid-19 era, quite a lot of people were getting married, according to the data we provided. And all early marriages are allowed because, considering the benefit to both partners, Covid-19 is not the main reason they get married, but it is the trigger for the main reason for marriage. Due to the long school holidays, many who are busy with their relationships end up falling into promiscuity."

The phenomenon of increasing the number of early marriages, as described by the Chairman of the Mandailing Natal Religious Court, basically does not only occur in Mandailing Natal but also occurs in other areas; for example, in Madiun district, the number of perpetrators of early marriages has increased significantly, even more than 100% compared to the case of early marriage in years. Previously, in 2019, only 50 people applied for marriage dispensation, but during the 2020 pandemic, this increased to 120 people (Saputra et al., 2021).

According to data released by the Ministry of National Development Planning/National Development Planning Agency (Kementerian Perencanaan Pembangunan Nasional/ Badan Perencanaan Pembangunan Nasional abbreviated Bappenas in Bahasa Indonesia), there are 400–500 girls aged 10–17 at risk of early marriage due to the Covid-19 pandemic (Pranita & Putri, 2021). The causes of the increase in child marriage during the Covid-19 pandemic are not much different from the causes of child marriage under normal conditions. On average, perpetrators of early marriage still come from poor family backgrounds and lack of education. The condition of family welfare has decreased during the Covid-19 pandemic, one of which is encouraging parents to allow their children to marry at an early age (Gussevi et al., 2021; Khaerani, 2019; Khoiri, 2022; Munib & Huda, 2023). School closures during the pandemic also had a major contribution to the cause of many children entering early marriage (Dewi & Muluyadi, 2022; Yuliani et al., 2022). Even the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (Kementerian Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Perlindungan Anak abbreviated Kementerian PPPA in Bahasa Indonesia) stated that until June 2020, the number of child marriages had increased to 24,000 during the Covid-19 pandemic (Luxiana, 2020).

Responding to the opinion of the chairman of the Mandailing Natal Religious Court, the Judge of the Mandailing Natal Religious Court who is in charge of justice regarding marriage dispensation matters, Abdul Aziz, stated:

"There has been a very significant increase in early marriages from 2020 to 2021, the causal factor is not only because of Covid 19, which is Many young or school age children apply for marriage dispensation for various reasons, especially eloping, getting pregnant out of wedlock, promiscuity, dropping out of school due to economic factors and getting married. However, the main reason is the change in the minimum age limit for marriage, namely 19 years for men and women based on Law Number 16 of 2019."

The age change factor also has a significant influence on the increase in the number of early marriages. Before this regulation was promulgated, high school age girls could already get married. After this rule was implemented girls could only get married after they graduated from high school or were at least 19 years old (Andriati et al., 2022; Fitianto & Nurullah, 2023; Ipetu et al., 2023). However, this reason is one of the factors causing the increase in the number of early marriages during the Covid-19 pandemic, namely from 2020 to 2021.

DISCUSSION

Law no. 1 of 1974 states that marriage is a physical and spiritual bond between a man and a woman as husband and wife with the aim of forming an eternally happy family based on the one and only God (Aristoni, 2016; Santoso, 2016). The Compilation of Islamic Law (Kompilasi Hukum Islam abbreviated KHI in Bahasa Indonesia), Article 2, states that marriage also according to Islamic law is a mistagan ghaliza or very strong contract to obey Allah's commands and carrying it out is an act of worship (Afiati et al., 2022; Asriati, 2012; Musthofa & Subiono, 2020). Interviews conducted with informants shows that not all of them understood the meaning of marriage and the purpose of marriage. This could be seen from the answers to questions asked to the informants. According to Ika, Fitri and Nanik, marriage is uniting two people in one family and having children. Santi, Minah, Susi and Sukma stated that marriage is a way to become an adult and become a housewife and head of the family to become one family.

Other girls do not know or understand about marriage. When they were asked about the purpose of their marriage, their faces were confused, and some even did not know their purpose in getting married. Their answers varied, for example Ika, Santi, Minah and Susi, the purpose of marriage is to obtain offspring. Meanwhile, Laila, Dina and Sila's goal of getting married is to be able to change their lives, take care of their family, take care of the household, and form a family. Fitri and Nanik understand that humans were created in pairs, therefore the purpose of marriage is to unite God and cannot be separated.

Based on the answers given by the informants, it can be concluded that most of them do not know the essence of marriage itself. In fact, they do not know what their purpose is in carrying out the marriage. They only carry out marriages as a form of petty romanticism during their courtship. Although some of the informants' goal of getting married was to alleviate their parents' economic conditions and change their lives. The social impact of early marriage is based on the results of interviews with all informants, as follows:

- a. Conflict in the family. Obviously, the conflicts that arise within the household have repercussions not only on the external environment but also on other aspects of the household. In addition, their life changes and the experiences they have subsequent to establishing a family also exert an impact. The following are the types of postmarital discord, as reported by the sources: Jealousy, according to Ika, is a potential source of conflict between a spouse. The spouse frequently engages in mobile phone gaming. Santi additionally noted that husbands frequently lose sight of time while playing online games, which can lead to conflicts. Additionally, Linda disclosed that they engaged in disagreements regarding financial matters and their management. Furthermore, Susi acknowledged the potential for disputes to arise in financial agreements. Divergent parental approaches towards children may also give rise to conflicts. Sukma and Nanik instigated the dispute by committing adultery and failing to support themselves. Disputes may also arise as a result of an individual's emotional disposition, which is frequently fiery and impolite. The participants could only patiently take it and make a greater effort to comprehend it.
- b. Regret and heavy pressure. Aside from conflict, the informants' experiences of early marriage are marked by remorse and intense pressure within their marriages. Ika expressed remorse for her early marriage due to her lack of work-related skills and her husband's inability to secure employment to provide for the family. In addition to this, she experienced regret due to her inability to provide for the children, an event that placed a significant mental burden on her. Laila added that she regretted having to cease attending school and getting a job due to her early marriage, which made it difficult for her to do so. Additionally, Santi and Susi expressed remorse for their hasty marriages at a young age, attributing it to the pressures they endured in life as a result of their spouses' domestic violence. Minah shared the sentiments of the majority of informants: she lamented entering into an early marriage due to her spouse's propensity for alcohol consumption and gambling. In situations where this was not possible, they resorted to involving their family members in an effort to resolve the issue.
- c. Loss of opportunities to continue education The average consequence of early marriage is that the offender is unable to further their education. Thus, they are limited to the elementary and secondary school levels of education. They are unable to further their education for an assortment of reasons. For instance, when they are expectant, nursing, giving birth, or caring for children. Aside from that, they are required to contribute to the household's financial resources and fulfill their responsibilities as wives including housework. Early marriage presents individuals with a range of challenges that hinder their ability to pursue further education, as previously mentioned. Due to a lack of education and an early age, the social impact will be significant. For instance,

- expertise regarding reproductive health, child care and education, and addressing familial challenges, including economic concerns.
- d. Unable to socialize. Additionally, informant statements indicated that after marriage, they experienced numerous alterations that had a profound impact on various facets of their lives, particularly social aspects. As an illustration, Susi asserted that her behavior underwent a profound transformation subsequent to her matrimonial union. She used to frequently go outside to play and socialize with friends, but she never did so again after her marriage because she was too occupied caring for the house and children. Nanik, Laila, Dina, Santi, and Sila all concurred with this sentiment. They stated that their social relationships had undergone a substantial transformation. They were no longer able to engage in recreation and socialize with peers their age, as the additional responsibilities they assumed after marriage significantly burdened them. accountable for managing the household and supervising the children. Shame, awkwardness, and a general lack of confidence in interacting with society impeded the socialization of all informants after early marriage, on average.
- e. Domestic violence. When marital violence transpires during a young age, the immense strain of responsibility frequently provokes intense emotional responses. Ineffective emotional regulation will result in domestic violence. Early marriage couples' incapability to control their emotions may result in discord and potentially harmful domestic circumstances. Undoubtedly, domestic violence will disrupt the continuity of the family unit. The primary factor contributing to the susceptibility of early marriages to conflict and domestic violence is the inadequate mental readiness to confront the multitude of challenges that arise during the household formation process. Living together prior to marriage and the birth of children as a result of relationships that occurred prior to marriage are frequently the two most significant contributors to domestic strife. Residing as a married couple prior to the consummation of the matrimonial union may result in desensitization or a reduction in sensitivity. They are incapable of experiencing love and affection, despite receiving the most attentive attention from their companion. Additionally, the unanticipated presence of children has the potential to instigate discord. Because the matrimonial union was consummated under coercive conditions. When viewed through a religious lens, an illicit marriage at its inception will not receive the blessing of God.
- f. Divorce. The culmination of numerous preceding effects is the prevalence of early matrimonial dissolution and brief marriages. Particularly during the early stages of matrimony, the unreadiness of young couples to confront challenges and obstacles frequently results in divorce. Age and education undeniably have a significant impact on an individual's mindset, and the mental fortitude to confront these challenges is an absolute necessity for

navigating life at home. Thus, marriage at an excessively young age will contribute to high divorce rates.

Developing harmony and joy within the household is considered a fundamental aim of matrimony. A joyful marriage is the pinnacle of all desires and even a sign of domestic success. Many individuals make every effort to attain it. Additionally, they have the utmost hopes for attaining a happy marriage. The factor that needs to be prepared to achieve these goals is mental readiness to face all the consequences of the many problems that arise due to early marriage. This mental readiness is one of the things that does not exist when carrying out an early marriage, so that they are unable to face all the obstacles and trials that occur at the beginning of a marriage. This unpreparedness gives rise to many problems that result in high divorce rates.

A very young age and low education will have an impact on mental readiness, emotional stability, and the ability to make decisions related to the continuation of the marriage. The problems and conflicts faced in marriage relationships and how to handle them, are not easy for those involved in early marriage, because their nature, immature way of thinking is still unstable and emotional which can sometimes worsen problems in the family. unpreparedness to resolve this problem can have a negative effect on the marital relationship. Because they are immature in their way of thinking, this can result in wider social impacts, including depression and stress. The heavy burdens of life, whether economic problems, social problems, family problems come and go, if they are not mentally and emotionally mature, it will cause heavy pressure for them.

CONCLUSION

There are several social impacts that occur because of early marriage. The conflicts they face in the household, of course, also affect the external environment and other impacts within the household. Apart from that, the changes they experience in their lives and their experiences after starting a family also have an influence. Apart from conflict, the social impact of early marriage is the regret and heavy pressure felt by the informants in their marriages. This regret occurs because there is no skill to work, and the husband also does not have a job that can meet the family's needs.

On average, perpetrators of early marriage cannot continue their education after early marriage. So, their education only reaches elementary and middle school levels and does not reach high school graduation. Significant changes in their social relationships, they can no longer socialize and play like friends of their age, because after marriage the burden they bear becomes heavier, namely household responsibilities and taking care of children.

Young age with enormous pressure of responsibility often gives rise to high emotional reactions. Emotions that cannot be managed well will lead to domestic violence. The inability of couples in early marriage to suppress their emotions can lead to conflict and even violence in the household. The accumulation of various previous impacts is the occurrence of divorce at a young age and marriages that are still very



short. Many divorces occur due to the unpreparedness of young couples to face trials and obstacles, especially at the beginning of marriage. So too early an age for getting married will have an impact on high divorce rates.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization	M.L., J., R.D., S.K., & N.S.	Resources	M.L., J., R.D., S.K., & N.S.
Data curation	M.L., J., R.D., S.K., & N.S.	Software	M.L., J., R.D., S.K., & N.S.
Formal analysis	M.L., J., R.D., S.K., & N.S.	Supervision	M.L., J., R.D., S.K., & N.S.
Funding acquisition	M.L., J., R.D., S.K., & N.S.	Validation	M.L., J., R.D., S.K., & N.S.
Investigation	M.L., J., R.D., S.K., & N.S.	Visualization	M.L., J., R.D., S.K., & N.S.
Methodology	M.L., J., R.D., S.K., & N.S.	Writing – original draft	M.L., J., R.D., S.K., & N.S.
Project administration	M.L., J., R.D., S.K., & N.S.	Writing - review &	M.L., J., R.D., S.K., & N.S.
		editing	

All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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The study was approved by Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Negeri Mandailing Natal, Mandailing Natal, Indonesia.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained before respondents answered the questions.

Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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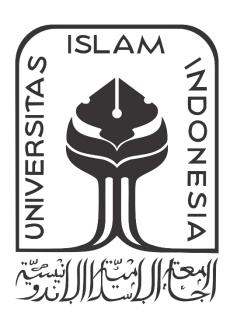
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