

POLICY BRIEF

Child Marriage in Indonesia: Past progress at a standstill

Background

Child marriage has garnered significant global attention in the last decade in response to growing evidence on the scale and scope of the problem. An estimated 14.2 million girls worldwide marry before age 18 each year.¹ Over 700 million women alive today were once child brides, and one in three of these girls married before age 15.²

Child marriage is a fundamental violation of girls' human rights. It limits girls' education, health, future income, safety, agency and abilities. It also restricts their status and roles in both the home and in society. The practice is largely driven by poverty and social norms that are rooted in the lower status of women and girls.

Girls who marry early face devastating risks to their health and well-being. Pregnancy-related deaths are the leading cause of death among girls ages 15-19 worldwide. Married girls have poorer nutrition, and child brides have higher risk for domestic violence and are more accepting of violence perpetrated against them. Married girls also have poorer educational and economic prospects, which reinforce their lower status and poverty. These effects are passed onto their children, continue into future generations, and serve as a drain on social and economic growth.

Child Marriage in Indonesia

Indonesia has frequently been lauded for its two-fold decline in child marriage prevalence in the last three decades, with a current rate of 17 percent according to global estimates.³ Yet, this rate still represents nearly more than one in six girls marrying before reaching adulthood.

Under the 1974 Marriage Law that sets the legal parameters for marriage in Indonesia, parental consent is required for all marriages under age 21. With parental consent, females can legally marry at age 16 and males at 19. Parents can petition marriage officers or district-level religious courts for an exemption to marry their daughter even earlier, with no minimum age limit.⁴ More than 90 percent of exemption requests are accepted, and the number of applications is rising.⁵

The Marriage Law not only fails to meet the age 18 threshold for marriage recommended by International Human Rights Treaty Bodies, it contradicts Indonesia's own 2002 Law on Child Protection, which prohibits marriage under age 18 under any circumstances. It also sets the minimum marriage age lower for girls than boys, even though girls are more vulnerable to the harmful consequences of child marriage.⁶ The Marriage Law does not require proof of age at marriage, making it all the more difficult to protect girls.

Findings from New Research in Indonesia

To better understand child marriage in Indonesia, a new UNICEF report, *Progress on Pause: An Analysis of Child Marriage Data in Indonesia*, analyzed yearly data from Indonesia's National Socioeconomic Survey (SUSENAS) to see how the child marriage rate fluctuated between 2008 and 2012. It also examined factors associated with child marriage such as education and economic status. The report analyzed 2008-2012 SUSENAS and 2010 Indonesia Population Census data to find prevalence rates at the provincial, district and sub-district levels and identify where the practice is the worst. Based on these analyses, the report identified five findings:

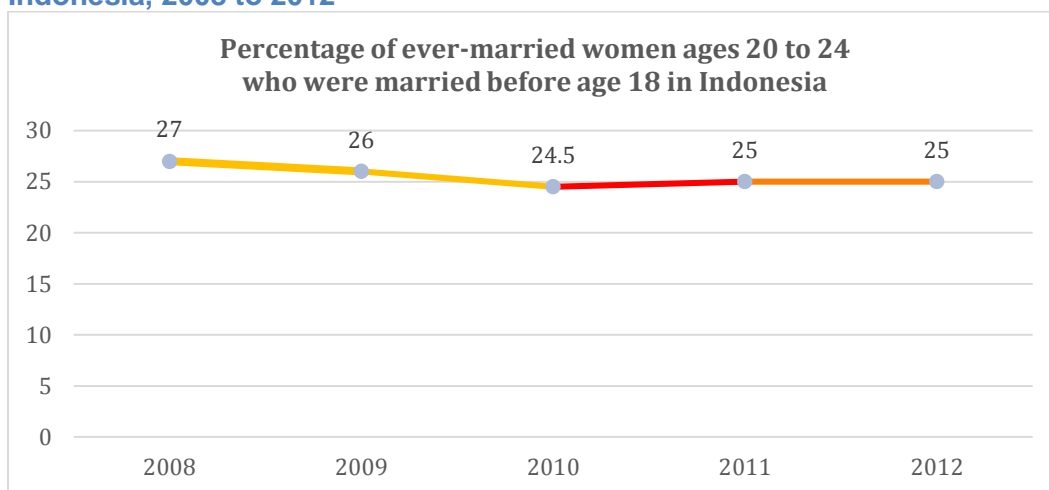
Contents

- Background
- Findings from New Research in Indonesia
- Opportunities for Action

1. Progress in reducing child marriage in Indonesia has plateaued and child marriage prevalence remains persistently high: Even with declines over the last three decades, the child marriage rate in Indonesia today is still high, with over one in six girls, or 340,000 annually, currently marrying before reaching adulthood.¹ Further, the rate has plateaued in recent years. Figure 1 shows that while declines occurred from 2008 to 2010, the child marriage rate increased in 2011 and then leveled off in 2012.

Marriage among girls below age 15 declined by one-third during the same time period (from 3.0% to 2.1%) with rural areas accounting for most of this decrease. This decline occurred in all provinces except for Central, South, East and West Kalimantan provinces. While a decline is encouraging, 50,000 girls still marry before age 15 each year in Indonesia.

Figure 1: Percentage of ever-married women ages 20 to 24 who were married before age 18 in Indonesia, 2008 to 2012



Source: Secondary analysis of SUSENAS 2008-2012

2. Child marriage is highest amongst girls ages 16 and 17: While marriage of girls under age 15 has declined, marriage among girls ages 16 and 17 has risen steadily, indicating that protection for girls falls away around age 16. Among married adolescent girls ages 15-19, marriage before age 16 declined from 7.2 percent to 5.5 percent between 2008 and 2012. During the same period, marriage among all girls under 18 rose slightly and then stabilized. These differing trends indicate fewer girls are marrying before 16, but once they reach this age an increasing number marry within the next two years, before they reach 18. This indicates that marriage of girls ages 16 and 17 is still viewed as acceptable in much of Indonesian society.

3. Child marriage and education are interlinked: The analysis found a strong correlation between child marriage and lower levels of education, as well as later marital age and higher levels of education. Among adolescent girls ages 15-19, 11 times fewer married girls are in school than unmarried girls (6.1% and 68.5% respectively). Girls who married before age 15 also have lower attainment levels than girls who married before age 18. These findings indicate that

Table 1: Females ages 15-19 by marital status and educational attainment

	Never attended or did not complete primary school (%)	Completed primary school (%)	Completed junior secondary school (%)	Completed senior secondary school (%)
Married	7	36	45	12
Unmarried	2	24	56	17

Secondary analysis of SUSENAS, 2012

¹ This figure is calculated by multiplying Indonesia's child marriage rate (17%) by the total number of women ages 20-24 (10,003,920 women according to 2010 census data), and dividing by 5 to capture a yearly average for the 20-24 age range.

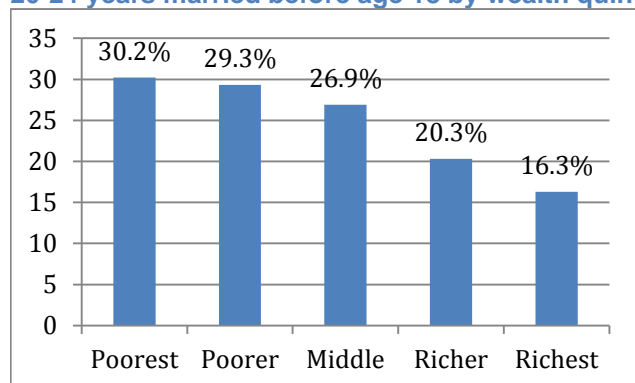
child marriage likely ends a girl's education.

Many married adolescent girls do not complete education beyond the primary school level. It is more likely for married girls to never attend or not to complete primary school compared to unmarried girls (7% and 2% respectively). Furthermore, nearly one-third more married girls report primary school as their highest level of educational attainment compared to unmarried girls (36% and 24% respectively).

Secondary school provides the best protection for delaying marriage until girls reach adulthood: 40.8 percent of girls who complete primary school marry before age 18, compared with 26.6 percent of girls who complete junior secondary school and 5.1 percent of girls who complete senior secondary school.

4. While poverty makes girls much more vulnerable to child marriage, social and cultural acceptance permeates all economic levels: Analysis showed that child marriage is strongly related to rural residence, poorer housing conditions, and lower levels of wealth, all categories associated with poverty. Child marriage is more than 1.5 times higher in rural compared to urban areas (29.6% and 19.1% respectively in 2012). Child marriage rates also increased as housing conditions deteriorated from adequate (21.7%) to inadequate (36.4%). In addition, girls from the poorest 20 percent of households were almost twice as likely to be married before age 18 compared to girls from the richest 20 percent of households.

Figure 2: Percentage of ever-married women 20-24 years married before age 18 by wealth quintile



Secondary analysis of SUSENAS 2008-2012

However, the data also showed that social norms accepting of the practice are influential among all economic levels in Indonesian society. Nearly one in six girls marry before age 18 among the richest households in Indonesia, indicating that financial security provides only limited protection.

5. Extremely high rates of child and adolescent marriage are found in geographical pockets throughout Indonesia: Analysis of geographical data from the 2010 census found rates varied widely across the country and by geographical level. Some of the highest-prevalence sub-districts were located in low prevalence districts and provinces, while some low-prevalence districts and provinces had large

populations resulting in extremely large numbers of girls marrying before 18.

Table 2: Ranked list of provinces by female child marriage prevalence

This table shows the average prevalence of ever married women aged 20-24 who have been married before age 18 (from 2008-2012 SUSENAS). Looking at the average prevalence from 2008 to 2012, West Sulawesi has the highest prevalence at 37.3 per cent, followed by both Central Kalimantan and Central Sulawesi (36.7 per cent and 34.4. per cent respectively). DKI Jakarta has the lowest average prevalence at 13 per cent.

No.	Provinces	Average Prevalence, 2008-2012
(1)	(2)	(3)
1.	West Sulawesi	37.3%
2.	Central Kalimantan	36.7%
3.	Central Sulawesi	34.4%
4.	Gorontalo	33.7%

5.	Papua	33.4%
6.	Southeast Sulawesi	32.6%
7.	South Kalimantan	32.5%
8.	South Sulawesi	31.3%
9.	West Java	30.7%
10.	Jambi	30%
11.	West Kalimantan	29.9%
12.	West Papua	28.9%
13.	North Maluku	27.8%
14.	East Java	27.7%
15.	Bengkulu	27.5%
16.	East Kalimantan	26.6%
17.	Bangka Belitung Islands	25.8%
18.	South Sumatera	25.3%
19.	Banten	25.3%
20.	West Nusa Tenggara	25.3%
21.	North Sulawesi	25.1%
22.	Maluku	23.3%
23.	Riau	21.1%
24.	East Nusa Tenggara	20.7%
25.	Riau Islands	20.1%
26.	Central Java	19.7%
27.	West Sumatera	17.6%
28.	Aceh	17.4%
29.	Lampung	16.7%
30.	Bali	15.8%
31.	West Sumatera	15.4%
32.	D.I. Yogyakarta	15.1%
33.	DKI Jakarta	13%

Table 3: Ranked list of provinces by female adolescent marriage (15-19 years old) prevalence

No.	Provinces	Prevalence	Estimated number of affected girls
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
1.	Bangka Belitung Islands	18.2%	8.479
2.	South Kalimantan	17.6%	26.980
3.	East Java	16.7%	236.404
4.	West Nusa Tenggara	16.3%	32.253
5.	Gorontalo	15.7%	7.560
6.	West Sulawesi	14.6%	8.053
7.	Central Kalimantan	14.6%	13.446
8.	Central Sulawesi	14.6%	15.273
9.	Jambi	14.2%	18.659
10.	Southeast Sulawesi	13.8%	14.329
11.	West Kalimantan	13.7%	25.922
12.	Central Java	13.5%	160.273
13.	West Papua	13.5%	4.200

14.	North Sulawesi	13.2%	11.381
15.	Papua	12.7%	14.913
16.	Lampung	12.4%	37.606
17.	West Java	12.3%	220.501
18.	South Sulawesi	11.4%	40.500
19.	Bali	11.3%	15.090
20.	South Sumatera	11.3%	35.105
21.	North Maluku	10.6%	5.045
22.	Bengkulu	10.2%	7.424
23.	East Kalimantan	9.9%	13.371
24.	Banten	9.5%	45.564
25.	Riau	7.7%	18.898
26.	D.I. Yogyakarta	7.2%	9.769
27.	Maluku	7.0%	4.799
28.	East Nusa Tenggara	6.9%	14.497
29.	West Sumatera	3.9%	8.011
30.	North Sumatera	15.8%	20.835
31.	DKI Jakarta	15.4%	12.520
32.	Aceh	15.1%	6.824
33.	Riau Islands	13%	1.882

Provinces: Table 3 provides the list of the provinces from the highest prevalence of female adolescent marriage to the lowest prevalence. Furthermore, the table also provides the estimated numbers of girls affected by child marriage in respective provinces. Nationally, female adolescent marriage prevalence (for 15-19 years old) is 11.5 per cent. Prevalence rate in each province is between 3.1 to 18.3 per cent. Female adolescent marriage prevalence is lowest in DKI Jakarta, Aceh and Riau Islands (3.3%, 3/3% and 3.1% respectively). Highest prevalence is found in Bangka Belitung Islands, South Kalimantan and East Java. Looking at the absolute numbers, East and West Java has the highest numbers of female adolescents who were married (236.404 and 220.501 respectively). Central Java also has high absolute numbers of female adolescent marriage, which is affecting 160.273 girls. While Bangka Belitung is one of the highest prevalent female adolescent marriage areas, the absolute numbers of girls that are affected is among the lowest in the country. A dual approach of working on both percentage and scale is required by decision makers if Indonesia is to make progress in achieving the new sustainable development goal (SDG) target of eliminating child marriage by 2030.

Districts and Sub-districts: 106 districts had female adolescent marriage rates of 20 percent or higher.² The highest prevalence of female adolescent marriage can be found in Central Java, East Java and South Kalimantan. Provincial data from the census can mask the districts where such prevalence is highest. For example, while Central Java's prevalence is 13.2 per cent, Wonosobo prevalence is 63%. In East Java, the provincial prevalence within this age range is 15 per cent, while its districts range from 5 to 35 per cent and sub-districts range from 2 to 64 per cent. The districts with the highest prevalence (Bondowoso at 35%, Probolinggo at 35%, Situbondo at 34% and Sumenep at 32%) have sub-districts with even higher values, such as Sumbermalang in Probolinggo with 64 per cent.

Of the 5,031 sub-districts in Indonesia, 1,085 sub-districts had above 25 per cent prevalence. In other words, 22 per cent of sub-districts feature prevalence of at least twice as high as the national average. Analysis of sub-districts showed that although most provinces include sub-districts with female adolescent marriage prevalence higher than 25 per cent. East Java, Central Java and South Kalimantan had the greatest number of high prevalence sub-districts.

² 20% was selected as a cut-off as it represents a rate 1.5 times the unweighted national average of 13 percent.

Opportunities for Action

While there has been great progress on child marriage in Indonesia – particularly among girls 15 and younger – there is still much to be done. The report offered five recommendations to help end child marriage in Indonesia:

1. Increase coverage of education services and other support to older girls ages 15 - 17 years: The large numbers of girls marrying at 16 and 17 in Indonesia point to the need to increase service access and coverage for older girls. Education provides the strongest protection against child marriage, and global evidence shows that completing senior secondary school is the best way to usher older girls into adulthood unmarried. Indonesia's new efforts to provide social assistance to help poor families access secondary school education and other benefits are critical for individual girls and their families in preventing child marriage. Early intervention with younger adolescents, both boys and girls, is also critical and should include working with adolescents on safe relationships and protective interactions that promote girls' empowerment. However, intervention should start when girls turn 15 since it is the time when most of them are transitioning from junior to senior secondary school.

2. Address social and cultural norms at the local level: The report found that child marriage is acceptable and practiced in Indonesia across all economic levels, in rural and urban communities, and in all parts of the country. While Indonesia's social and cultural diversity makes it challenging to target cultural norms broadly, targeted efforts can respond appropriately at the local level. Specific strategies include involving local leaders, religious leaders and other influential community members, working with parents to make better investments in daughters, working with men and boys, creating social networks for girls, and supporting community mobilization efforts.

3. Address the role poverty plays by creating more opportunities for girls to access higher education and economic skills' training: Economic empowerment opportunities targeted to girls are critical to ending child marriage, within a protective framework that promotes their education as well as skills in financial literacy, amongst others. These efforts will shift how females are valued in society and value themselves. Educational and economic strengthening opportunities targeting adolescent girls should include higher education, leadership training, vocational training, business and financial management training, income generation training, and microfinance and savings groups. Individual social protection efforts are more effective if complemented by national social protection efforts that aim to reduce household and child poverty, for example through universal child grants and social assistance schemes. Indonesia is playing a leading role in the East Asia and Pacific region in rolling out social protection measures that can be strengthened to more effectively target vulnerable children, families and adolescent girls at risk.

4. Target efforts to the provinces, districts and sub-districts with the highest prevalence rates and highest absolute numbers of female adolescent marriage: The study demonstrated the need for targeting child marriage by geographical level and location, as rates varied widely across and within provinces, districts and sub-districts. Efforts to address child marriage should therefore be targeted to the districts and sub-districts identified in this report as where the problem is the worst in Indonesia. A combination strategy should be used, with broader approaches to address the widespread prevalence at the provincial and district levels, and more specific, locally-responsive approaches to address the more concentrated problem at the sub-district level.

5. Support further research on the issue of child marriage in Indonesia: Research on the issue of child marriage is fairly new to Indonesia and much remains to be learned. Investment in further data-driven research is needed to improve program and policy responses. This includes a better understanding of how

decisions are made within the family about girls' marriage and education, what factors allow some parents to invest heavily in their daughters, and what girls' expectations and aspirations are for their lives.

Looking Forward

Indonesia is poised to seriously tackle the issue of child marriage. The report, *Progress on Pause: An Analysis of Child Marriage Data in Indonesia*, urges a strong, multi-stakeholder commitment to tackle child marriage through effective legislation and programming. It asks that girls be included at all stages of a response, as their participation is vital to their own empowerment and to developing effective interventions. Child marriage drains girls, their families, and the country of their potential. Indonesia is ready for a better investment in its future by improving the lives of its girls and women.

REFERENCES

¹ United Nations Population Fund, *Marrying Too Young: End child marriage*, UNFPA, New York, 2012, p. 44.

² United Nations Children's Fund, *Ending Child Marriage: Progress and prospects*, UNICEF, New York, 2014, p. 1.

³ *Ending Child Marriage: Progress and prospects*, p. 5.; and Jones, Gavin. W., 'Which Indonesian women marry youngest, and why?', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2001, pp. 67, 77.

⁴ Evenhuis, Mark and Jennifer Burn, *Just Married, Just a Child: Child marriage in the Indo-Pacific region*, Plan International Australia, Melbourne, 2014, p. 26.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Hamilton, Carolyn., *Legal Protection from Violence: analysis of domestic laws relating to violence against children in ASEAN States* (draft), Coram Children's Legal Centre, Essex (unpublished), pp. 124-126.