

Conference Paper

Community-based Women Empowerment: A Successful Strategy Against Early Marriage in Blora District

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Abstract.

Early marriage has several negative implications on women and wider society, such as reproductive health and the economy in Indonesia. In terms of health, it leads to adolescent pregnancy, risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections and experiencing gender-based violence (GBV), while in the context of economy, child marriage is estimated to cause economic losses of at least 1.7 percent of gross domestic income (GDP). According to the V, from January to June 2020, 34,000 recorded applications for marriage dispensation were recorded. (From this number, 97% were granted, and 60% of those who applied were children under 18. A specific case occurred in a village at Blora Regency, where the mindset of getting married at such a young age is natural. Society assumes that girls who have graduated from high school are ready to be a homemaker and let them follow their husbands after marriage. This article will determine how effective policy interventions can reduce the number of early marriages. It uses descriptive qualitative research by comparing community response surveys after participating in socialization activities. Based on this research, the most influential form of women's empowerment is community-based (Srikandi Desa). This article also suggests that collaboration between stakeholders positively impacts the success of policy interventions on the dangers of early marriage campaigns.

Keywords: early marriage, empowerment, community

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1. Introduction

One poverty issue in Indonesia is early marriage. Several studies support this finding. First, 1,184,100 women aged 20-24 years were married at the age of 18 years in 2018 [1]. In 2019, there were only 23,700 applications [2]. Third, between January 2020, 34,000 applications for the dispensation of early marriage (under 19 years old) were submitted [3]. These historical data's showed that the proportion of women aged 20-24 years who are married or living together before the age of 15 in the last 5 years in Indonesia was very dynamic, from 0.54 in 2016 to 0.5 in 2020, in which the largest number was in Java with 668,900 women [4].

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These numbers have led to various negative effects, such as early childbearing and high rates of maternal morbidity and mortality [5] [6]. In addition, Dagne [7] discovered four main reasons for early marriage. First, the feeling of the need to marry the child when the parents are young; therefore, the child's future is guaranteed before the parents grow old and die. Second, there is competition for laws that improve and enhance the status of the family. Third, conformity to tradition and fear of stigmatization. Fourth, there is a need to ensure virginity in girls. Family economic problems, local religious, social, and cultural norms, avoiding pregnancy outside marriage, school closures, and lack of education were also related to early marriage in 2020 or during the pandemic Covid-19 [8] [9].

Response has been made by the Government of Indonesia through Indonesian Law Number 16 (2019), which is an amendment to Law No. 1 of 1974 concerning marriage. The regulation stated that marriage is only permitted if the man and women have reached the age of 19 (19) years, although there is an exception if there is an event of deviation in which the male's parents and/or parents the woman can ask for dispensation to court on grounds of urgency accompanied by sufficient supporting evidence. However, the actual action did not reflect the regulation where there were more than 1 million girls married at child age in West Sulawesi, Central Sulawesi and Southeast Sulawesi [4].

According to the absolute number of child marriages, West Java, East Java, and Central Java are the three highest provinces. In West Java, there were 5.523 couples will be married early in 2022. The highest number of child marriages occurred in Garut Regency, with 570 marriages, followed by 564 marriages in Indramayu, 541 marriages in Ciamis, 480 in Cirebon, and the remaining under 400 marriages [10].

In East Java, the National Population and Family Planning Agency released data throughout 2022, with a total of 15.212 marriage dispensation applications in East Java, of which 38 were regencies/cities, three of which are the highest in East Java. However, the highest 3 regencies/cities in East Java were Malang, Jember, Kraksaan, and Probolinggo. Of the 15,212 marriage dispensation applications in East Java, 80 percent of them were first-time pregnancies [11].

Meanwhile, the Central Java Office of Women's Empowerment, Child Protection, Population Control, and Family Planning (DP3AP2KB) noted that cases of early child marriage in the Central Java Province experienced a significant increase. Office for Women's Empowerment, Child Protection, Population Control and Family Planning of Central Java Province stated that child marriage occurred in almost all regions in Central Java, starting from Jepara, Pati, Blora, Grobogan, Cilacap, Brebes, Banjarnegara, Purbalingga and several other districts/cities in Central Java.

Based on data from DP3AP2KB Central Java, there were 11,301 cases of early childhood marriages for women and 1,671 cases for men. The spike in child marriage cases is due to the spike in early childhood marriage cases due to two different phenomena: the Covid-19 pandemic and Marriage Law number 16 of 2019. However, it jumped dramatically when the pandemic arrived, reaching 12.972 cases. This number continues to increase in 2021 which reaches 13.595 cases [12]. Therefore, appropriate efforts are required to reduce the number of early marriages.

Although all three provinces in Java are the highest in Indonesia, Java is still relatively high in terms of early marriages [13]. Laksono et al. [14] found that low education is a risk factor for women entering early marriage in rural Indonesia. The other two variables that were also found to be low-risk factors were wealth status (poor) and work status [15]. These problems were found in Blora and Central Java. Early marriage in Blora is relatively high and comparable to that in other parts of Indonesia. Kompas.com [16] stated that Blora consistently ranks among the highest regions in Central Java for early marriages, with nearly 300 children applying for dispensation from marriage to the Blora Religious Court.

In response to this, there is community-based women empowerment (Srikandi Desa) that does many things related to early marriage in Blora, Central Java. Thus, this article aims to determine the extent of the success of educating on the dangers of early marriage through community-based women empowerment in Blora, Central Java. Therefore, the main question is to what extent is community-based empowerment successful in tackling early marriages in Blora, Central Java? To determine the success of community-based women's empowerment, we describe Srikandi Desa's actions.

2. Methods

This study used qualitative and quantitative approaches. A qualitative approach is an understanding of how people perceive and experience events [17]. The qualitative approach aims to gain an in-depth understanding of human behavior and the reasons that govern it. The primary aim of qualitative research is to provide a complete and detailed description of a research topic.

In this study, a qualitative approach was utilized in two ways. First, we produced a rich, detailed description of the experiences and phenomena being studied. Second, emphasis was placed on understanding participants' experiences from their perspectives. Qualitative interviews were conducted with women who actively participated in the community.

In addition, we conducted a survey to determine the dangers of early marriage after being active in community-based women's empowerment. Quantitative surveys generally focus on gathering numerical data and generalizing them across groups or explaining a particular phenomenon. When used in quantitative methods, surveys typically gather data that can be structured and statistically analyzed.

In this article, surveys will be conducted using Explanatory Surveys, which are often used to study cause-effect relationships, allowing researchers to explain patterns of behavior.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Before-After Knowledge about Community-Based Women Empowerment

Based on the questionnaire about community-based women empowerment, we can say that there are improvements in terms of understanding the benefits of community-based women empowerment. This can be seen in Table 1.

The table shows that adolescents' level of understanding is higher than that of their parents'. The most significant increase elements for teenagers are: 1) understanding the number of cases of early marriage encountered in the neighborhood and 2) the risk of early marriage on high infidelity. For parents, the increase in each element was not significant.

3.2. What is Community-Based Women Empowerment?

Society, in the context of community empowerment, is community. The community has two meanings: 1) as a social group that resides in a certain location, it has the same culture and history; and 2) as the smallest settlement unit, above which there is a small town (town), and above which there is a city or big city (city) [18]. The concept of community empowerment in development offers a broad perspective. Empowerment refers to the development of equitable sharing of power to increase the political awareness and power of weak groups and increase their influence over natural resources and sustainable management [19]. Empowerment is a means to strengthen the capacity of organizations/groups to change their current situation and to have the power to encourage major changes that are needed in society.

TABLE 1: Questionnaire for teenagers and parent of Sambongwangan Village in Srikandi Desa.

Number	Elements	Results from Teenagers		Results from parents	
		Before	After	Before	After
1	Current level of understanding regarding the impact of early marriage;	-69.30%	88%	-62.60%	79.30%
2	Number of cases of early marriage have you encountered in the neighborhood;	-57.30%	90.60%	-68.60%	70%
3	Level of understanding regarding the factors that cause failure of early marriage households;	-60.60%	88%	-70%	79.30%
4	Knowledge on the factors driving early marriage;	-64.60%	90%	-71.30%	77.30%
5	Risk of early marriage on high infidelity;	-54.60%	85.30%	-60.60%	78.60%
6	Willingness to deepen knowledge regarding early marriage socialization material;	-73.30%	89.30%	-58.60%	72%
7	Knowledge regarding the risk of early marriage in high divorce cases;	-58.60%	88.60%	-67.30%	72%
8	Alert level when the negative effects occurred in early marriage;	-76.60%	88.60%	-63.30%	79.30%
9	The importance of socialization regarding pre-marital preparation materials before marriage;	-80.60%	87.30%	-72%	73.30%
10	Level of awareness of the people in your neighborhood about the dangers of early marriage on a person's physical and spiritual health;	-63.30%	84.60%	-71.30%	72%

Source: Author's data collection: 2022.

Meanwhile, there is also the concept of the deprivation trap, which analyzes the causes of poverty as a complex and interrelated cause-and-effect relationship of powerlessness, vulnerability, physical weakness, poverty, and isolation. There is a link between powerlessness and the other dimensions of entrapment. Powerlessness limits access to state resources, complicates legal justice for abuses, leads to a loss of bargaining power, and makes people more fragile in dealing with other powers. Finally, it is said that the situation of powerlessness can be overcome by "enabling and empowering the poor," which is an important effort because poverty is not a natural condition but a process of social, economic, and political disempowerment [20].

3.3. Community-Based Women Empowerment Action Plan

Based on the questionnaire, we can see that the intervention of Srikandi Desa increased awareness of early marriages. For teenagers of Sambongwangan Village in Srikandi Desa, the intervention increased the impact of early marriage from -69.30% to 88%.

A similar trend was happened where -63.30% before intervention and 84.60% after the intervention on the matters of number of cases of early marriage have you encountered in the neighborhood, level of understanding regarding the factors that cause failure of early marriage households, knowledge on the factors driving early marriage, risk of early marriage on high infidelity, willingness to deepen knowledge regarding early marriage socialization material, knowledge regarding the risk of early marriage in high divorce cases, alert level when the negative effects occurred in early marriage, the importance of socialization regarding pre-marital preparation materials before marriage, and level of awareness of the people in your neighborhood about the dangers of early marriage on a person's physical and spiritual health.

Similar trends were observed for the parents of Sambongwangan Village in Srikandi Desa. The elements are the level of knowledge of parenting patterns, the importance of applying good and right parenting to the family, the importance of communication between child and mother in the family, the importance of children's motivation to achieve their goals, the importance of continuing education for a child, parenting style correctness after receiving the socialization material, adjustment of the education major to the child's talent interests, the importance of the child's education level in getting a job, the importance of child discipline, for example, applying a curfew for children, and the importance of fair distribution of tasks in the family (e.g., child sweeps, mother mops, and father cooks). All of them had percentage before -71.30% and after 72%.

From the percentages, it can be said that the initial step of Srikandi Desa as a community-based women empowerment organization was to conceptualize an event that had a high level of participation. The proposed activity was parenting education. This activity was chosen because the main focus of early marriage education is on the parents of women. Field observations and Focus Group Discussions were then conducted to identify the main problems that caused the high rate of early marriage in the village. Based on these observations, parenting education is needed for young women. Therefore, Srikandi Desa collaborated with the GenRe Forum (Planned Generation Ambassador) from BKKBN Blora Regency to prepare appropriate activities for adolescent girls. Forum GenRe is a movement that contains a group of young people aged 10-24 years who prepare for health, education, career, and family life planning

through team building, creative thinking, and class programs spread throughout Indonesia with the composition of Youth Information and Counselling Centers (PIK) and GenRe Ambassadors.

The second step of the Community-Based Women Empowerment Action Plan is grassroots efforts involving local organizations, groups, or leaders. In addition to education involvement, community-based empowerment can also be achieved by

1. Economic Empowerment increases women's participation in the economy through microfinance or microcredit programs, entrepreneurship training, job placement services, and efforts to remove barriers to employment or business ownership for women.
2. Healthcare and well-being improve access to healthcare services for women, particularly reproductive health services. This might also include efforts to address issues such as domestic violence, mental health, nutrition, and other aspects of women's wellbeing.
3. Political Participation and Advocacy involve efforts to increase women's participation in local politics and decision-making processes, advocacy for legal reforms to promote gender equality, and initiatives to raise awareness about women's rights.
4. Social Empowerment is the initiative to change societal attitudes and norms that hinder women's empowerment. This could involve public awareness campaigns, community dialogue, education programs, and other efforts to promote gender equality at the social level.
5. Monitoring and Evaluation, which includes strategies for monitoring progress and evaluating the effectiveness of various initiatives, with adjustments made as necessary to ensure that the plan is achieving its objectives.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, community-based women's empowerment is a strategic and essential tool for promoting gender equality and social development. This approach allows for the creation of initiatives that are most relevant and effective in specific local contexts by fostering more sustainable change. It draws upon the strengths and resources of the community, contributing to a sense of ownership and engagement among local stakeholders.

Education and vocational training programs are vital, as they provide women with the skills and knowledge needed to thrive in society and contribute economically. Economic empowerment measures, such as access to credit and entrepreneurial training, also play a crucial role in ensuring women's financial independence and resilience. Enhanced healthcare services with a special focus on reproductive health are critical for women's well-being. Efforts to combat societal issues such as domestic violence contribute significantly to the overall safety and mental health of women in the community.

Political participation and advocacy initiatives foster the inclusion of women in decision-making processes, enabling them to contribute to political discourse and to shape policies that directly impact their lives. These initiatives also serve to challenge and alter traditional gender roles, thereby promoting a culture of equality. Efforts to alter societal attitudes towards women and gender roles can result in long-lasting societal change, creating an environment that encourages and supports women's empowerment.

Monitoring and evaluation ensure the continual refinement of strategies, and maintain their effectiveness and relevance. Community-based women's empowerment is, therefore, an essential catalyst for the advancement of gender equality and the overall development of society. Collaborative, locally tailored strategies of community-based women empowerment serve to generate lasting change, fostering resilience and prosperity for women and the community as a whole. The success of such initiatives signifies a promising path towards a world that respects and promotes the rights, capabilities, and potential of all women.

Finally, the inclusion of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms is crucial for maintaining the effectiveness and relevance of initiatives. Regular review and adjustment of strategies based on their outcomes ensures that the action plan continually meets its objectives and adapts to changing circumstances. In conclusion, a community-based female empowerment action plan represents a holistic, adaptable, and locally rooted strategy for advancing gender equality. By involving the community and focusing on the specific needs of women within it, such a plan has the potential to have a significant, lasting impact on the lives of women and on society as a whole.

Community empowerment can only be accommodated by society, which has been impacted by itself. To answer the research question of the extent to which Srikandi Desa is involved in the strategy against early marriage, the authors argue that the Srikandi Desa was established as an initial stage of early marriage awareness. If we follow the argument of self-awareness, it can be followed by education in each family about early marriage as well as health education. Using these approaches, the whole strategy and

100% successful strategy against early marriage can be achieved in the Blora District, Central Java, Indonesia.

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