

Research Article

Empowering Women Leadership Through Community Mobilization to Prevent Early Marriages

Prawinda Putri Anzari^{1*}, Raisa Fitri²¹Communication Department, Universitas Negeri Malang, Indonesia²Management Department, Universitas Negeri Malang, Indonesia**Abstract.**

This qualitative research study explored the impact of early marriages on women in Malang Regency and examined strategies for preventing such marriages by empowering women. Utilizing data collected through Focus Group Discussions (FGD), the research investigated the complex web of social, economic, and generational consequences resulting from child marriages in rural areas. The study highlights the significant role played by Women's Leadership Houses (RKP) in the Singosari and Karangploso regions, where community mobilization is employed to foster gender equality and empower women. RKP's community engagement approach allows members to dissect the underlying factors driving early marriages and adolescent interactions within their communities. The research uncovered a diverse range of issues associated with early unions, each uniquely shaped by the local environment. RKP's methodology places a strong emphasis on problem identification and potential recognition, encompassing human and natural resources while challenging prevailing social norms that perpetuate early marriages. In conclusion, this study underscores the importance of empowering women and promoting gender equality as key strategies in preventing early marriages. Through qualitative research methods and community engagement via FGDs, we can aspire to create a future where early marriages become a historical relic and women attain the agency and opportunities they rightfully deserve.

Keywords: Early Marriage; Women Empowerment; Community Mobilization; Gender Equality

Corresponding Author: Prawinda Putri Anzari; email: prawinda.anzari.fis@um.ac.id

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1. Introduction

The trend of child marriage in Indonesia has experienced a decline from 2008 to 2018; however, unfortunately, the rate of this decline appears to be relatively slow. In Indonesia, there are over one million women aged 20-24 years old, among whom their first marriage occurred before the age of 18 (1.2 million individuals) (1). Child marriage has indeed been a longstanding issue, yet it remains unresolved to this day (2). According to data from Statistics Indonesia in 2020, the percentage of child marriages in 2019 was 10.82%, with 15.24% occurring in rural areas and 6.82% in urban areas. Based on data from UNICEF on the State of the World Children, Indonesia ranks

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seventh globally in terms of child marriages and is the second-largest in the ASEAN region (3). Cases of child marriage are distributed across various provinces, with the highest prevalence at 22.8% in West Sulawesi, 33.68% in South Kalimantan, and a staggering 91.91% in Central Sulawesi. Law Number 16 of 2019 stated that the age limit for marriage, which was originally 19 years for the male gender and 16 years for the female gender, was changed to 19 (Nineteen) years for both men and women (4). However, research functions recently published by the Australia Indonesia Partnership for Justice In Malang Regency, early marriages increased rapidly during the Covid-19 pandemic. There are 1.000 applications for dispensation of marriage age at the Religious Court of Malang Regency. Most of these early marriages occurred because they were pregnant out of wedlock and arranged by their parents. Women are the most disadvantaged parties in early marriage because they are vulnerable to dropping out of school, cut off access to economic empowerment, becoming victims of domestic violence, prone to complications when pregnant at a young age, to the possibility of giving birth to stunting babies. Women are the most disadvantaged parties in early marriage because they are vulnerable to dropping out of school, cut off access to economic empowerment, becoming victims of domestic violence, prone to complications when pregnant at a young age, to the possibility of giving birth to stunting babies. Data from the public health center in Malang Regency shows that more than 2,000 toddlers experience stunting due to pregnancy by mothers under the age of 20 years (5). Women are the most disadvantaged parties in early marriage because they are vulnerable to dropping out of school, cut off access to economic empowerment, becoming victims of domestic violence, prone to complications when pregnant at a young age, to the possibility of giving birth to stunting babies. Data from Malang Regency shows that more than 2,000 toddlers experience stunting due to pregnancy by mothers under the age of 20 years. The harmony within a married household requires emotional maturity, often intertwined with the couple's age. This challenge spans across nations globally, prompting the United Nation (UN) to address it through Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a set of 17 goals with 169 targets to achieve by 2030. One core aim is to eliminate child marriage, as emphasized in the fifth SDG. "Achieve Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls". This SDG underscores gender equality as fundamental and pivotal for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world. Child marriage, forced marriage, and female genital mutilation are targeted for eradication due to their discriminatory nature, constituting human rights violations. Indonesia, a UN member, aligns with the SDGs, demonstrating commitment through Presidential Regulation No.59 of 2017. This regulation reinforces Indonesia's dedication to eliminating child marriage and aligns

with the UN's oversight and assessment of global SDG implementation over the next 15 years (6). Child marriage widens the gender inequality gap, as it predominantly affects young girls from impoverished families with low educational attainment, residing in rural areas (7). Gender inequality does not solely stem from cultural traditions and beliefs but is also perpetuated by governmental systems and policies that perpetuate the perception in society that women occupy a lower social status compared to men. It is not surprising that numerous policies place women at a disadvantage (8). To promote gender equality in the case of the high prevalence of child marriage in Malang city, intervention from various stakeholders, including the community, is necessary. Communities can mobilize themselves to promote gender equality, thereby providing vulnerable women with opportunities to enhance their status within society. The concept of community mobilization is broadly defined as individuals taking organized action around specific community issues (9). One of the community mobilization activities with the primary goal of reducing the incidence of child marriage in Malang Regency and enhancing the leadership capacity of women is the Women's Coalition for Leadership (Koalisi Perempuan Untuk Kepemimpinan) community.

The Women's Coalition for Leadership (KPUK) is a community that strives to empower women's leadership so that those vulnerable can advocate for their dignity. KPUK initiates public policy advocacy programs to address gender inequality issues, where the women's organizing strategy by KPUK is manifested in the Women's Leadership House (RKP). RKP was established to address social issues, such as the widespread occurrence of child marriage in Malang Regency. This effort aligns with the goal of achieving Sustainable Development Goal 5, which is Gender Equality. Therefore, the research problem in this study firstly explores the position and condition of women who marry early, and secondly, investigates how the formation of RKP by KPUK becomes a strategy for empowering women in achieving gender equality.

2. Research Method

This research constitutes a qualitative investigation utilizing a case study design for data gathering, as acknowledged by (10). The qualitative method, being a social product and process, relied on Focus Group Discussion (FGD) sessions for data collection. The choice of FGD for data collection was driven by its effectiveness in enabling researchers to understand participants' attitudes, beliefs, expressions, and terminology related to the discussed topics. This approach was instrumental in uncovering concealed reasons behind participants' responses.

In conducting the FGDs, the number of participants played a crucial role in steering the discussions. It was deemed more practical to engage a smaller yet manageable group rather than conducting FGDs with larger groups, as advocated by (11). The initial step taken by the researcher in initiating the FGDs was to determine the number and criteria for participant selection, who served as the primary units of research analysis. Participants included members of the Women's Leadership Coalition (KPuK) and female cadres from Leadership Houses in Malang Regency, specifically in the Ngijo and Singosari subdistricts. Following the selection process, an FGD was conducted with 12 individuals who met these criteria, comprising five members from the core leadership team of KPuK and seven participants from the Female Leadership House cadres. The FGD took place face-to-face at the KPuK secretariat office in Malang City.

Before initiating the FGD sessions, participants were briefed on the purpose of the FGD, the nature of the study, and guidelines such as seeking facilitator approval prior to responding. All participants consented to the recording of the FGD sessions for research purposes. This initial communication aimed to create a comfortable and open atmosphere among the participants during the FGD, aligning with Britten's recommendations (12). The FGD session lasted approximately 120 minutes, with two researchers involved: one serving as the facilitator guiding the discussion, while the other observed.

To conduct the FGDs, the researcher engaged in the crucial process of coding and analyzing the collected data. The data obtained from both the FGDs and observations were meticulously transcribed and organized. A systematic coding process was employed to identify recurring themes, patterns, and significant insights within the data. Codes were applied to specific segments of the data, creating a structured framework for analysis. This coding process allowed the re-searcher to categorize and interpret the responses, attitudes, and beliefs of the participants. Subsequently, these codes and categories were synthesized to construct qualitative narratives that provided a deeper understanding of the research topic. The final stage of data analysis adhered to the principles outlined by Creswell (13), encompassing data interpretation, synthesis, and drawing meaningful conclusions from the coded and analyzed data.

In addition to conducting Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), data collection for this study involved conducting in-depth interviews with six individuals who have experienced early marriage in Kabupaten Malang. These interviews aimed to delve deeper into the experiences of the interviewees, who are survivors of early marriage. The selection criteria for these interviewees were carefully established. They included individuals who married before the age of 18 for their first marriage, sought dispensation

for marriage age from the religious court, already had children, had been married for a minimum of 5 years, and were residents of Kabupaten Malang.

The purpose of the in-depth interviews was to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges, perspectives, and experiences of individuals who have undergone early marriage. These interviews provided an opportunity for the participants to share their stories and insights in a detailed manner, allowing for a richer exploration of the topic. Similar to the FGDs, the interviews were conducted in a confidential and supportive environment to encourage open and honest communication. The researcher ensured that participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences and perspectives. Data obtained from both the FGDs and in-depth interviews were meticulously recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. The insights gathered from these interviews complemented the findings from the FGDs, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of early marriage in Kabupaten Malang.

3. Result

3.1. The Position and Condition of Women in Early Marriages

Communities with high instances of child marriage are typically located in rural areas. A region with a high prevalence of child marriages is considered to harbor social, economic, and even moral issues. This negative perception can detrimentally affect the entire community. In some villages in Malang Regency, a high incidence of child marriage is often seen as a “red mark” on the village government and is not openly discussed. However, failure to address this issue hinders its resolution. Parents of child marriage survivors often face negative judgment from the community. They are frequently associated with moral, ethical, social, and even religious violations. Consequently, they may experience social ostracization. From an economic standpoint, parents with new families resulting from early marriages may face additional financial burdens. When young parents must seek employment outside the village, the responsibility for child rearing often falls on them or other close relatives. While financially stable families may not find this problematic, families with limited economic resources may struggle to provide adequate care for the children.

Survivors of early marriages also experience dramatic consequences. Both boys and girls are affected, but the impact on girls is often more severe. Among young female survivors of child marriage in Malang Regency, the following impacts have been observed: economic consequences, empowerment and knowledge, future prospects

and aspirations, generational impact, education, and sexual violence. Economically, early marriage often impedes women's access to educational and employment opportunities. This dependence on husbands or their husbands' families reduces women's financial independence. Moreover, due to limited education and a lack of training for child marriage survivors in Malang Regency, these women often lack the necessary skills to enter the job market, leading them to accept low-paying jobs with reduced economic mobility. Jensen & Thornton (14) stated that women who enter into marriage at a young age typically possess lower levels of education, commence childrearing responsibilities at an earlier stage, and exhibit reduced influence when it comes to making decisions within the household. Furthermore, they face an increased likelihood of encountering instances of domestic violence.

Regarding the generational aspect, early marriage perpetuates a cycle of early marriage. Children born to parents who married early tend to face similar or even higher risks of early marriage because they are exposed to the same norms and behavioral patterns (15). Due to their limited role in decision making within the household, young mothers often lack the authority to decide that their children should continue their education instead of marrying early.

In terms of education and sexual awareness, early marriage hinders women's education and sexual awareness. Lack of knowledge about their bodies, sexual rights, and contraception can lead to reproductive health problems and an increased risk of unwanted pregnancies (16). Most women who marry early in Malang Regency have long intervals between their first and second child due to limited access to healthcare and information about contraceptive methods for married couples. Additionally, strong religious stigma often prevails, suggesting that contraception to prevent pregnancy is prohibited in Islam. In summary, the analysis of the position of women who are survivors of early marriage in Malang Regency reveals that this phenomenon is not just an individual issue but a complex social issue closely related to gender structures and norms within society.

3.2. The Formation of Women's Leadership House (RKP) as Community Mobilization to Promote Gender Equality

Empowerment is related to the development of potential and capacities, both individually and collectively. Women's empowerment, fundamentally, involves building their ability to critically analyze issues, have a strong position, and provide leadership that leads them towards a prosperous, just, and equitable life. It combines the goal of

building self confidence and removing all barriers to women's progress. The ultimate outcome of an empowerment process is the expansion of choices for women in line with their aspirations, self confidence, and needs in political, social, and economic aspects. Furthermore, this understanding of empowerment aligns perfectly with the broader global context. Gender equality and the empowerment of women are not just localized concerns; they are central to the sustainable development efforts in the least developed nations, such as Ethiopia. In essence, the empowerment of women serves as a catalyst for achieving poverty reduction goals, meeting millennium development targets, and realizing sustainable development objectives (17).

Empowering women does not mean disregarding the presence and roles of men. Programs and efforts for women's empowerment must take into account cultural (cultural) roots and positions and roles (structures) in society. Furthermore, women's empowerment programs and efforts should be conducted collaboratively with men because the marginalization of women is not just their own issue but a concern for the entire society, including men. Women's leadership is crucial, especially in contributing to addressing issues related to their own interests, including the prevention and handling of child marriage. From a young age, girls and adolescent girls need to see real life examples of independent and confident women in their lives who demonstrate that they can achieve various goals and aspire to be anything they want to be. One way to empower women and prevent child marriage is through women's organization. Women's organization aims not only to provide long term assistance that fosters independence but also to enable women to make their own decisions and actively participate in decision making processes related to their lives within the family, community, and the state system. By organizing, the potential and voices of individual women become stronger and are no longer ignored. In field programs, this organization is initiated by the Women's Coalition for Leadership through the establishment of Women's Leadership Houses (RKP).

Women's Leadership Houses have been established in several villages in Malang Regency, specifically in the Singosari and Karangploso regions. In practice, the formation of RKP is membership-based, where more members mean a stronger organization. Leaders encourage members to identify the root causes of child marriage, involve more people, lead meetings, develop strategies, and make decisions to strengthen the organization by mobilizing commitment. RKP is not present to solve all problems but to identify the issues in its surroundings. Problem identification includes all the issues faced by women individually and in groups. For survivors of child marriage, some of the problems they face include a lack of participation skills in the community, limited skills for productive activities, a lack of access to capital, and limited knowledge about

child health and education. RKP will prioritize these issues based on their capacity to address them and the urgency to tackle them. Furthermore, RKP also conducts potential identification, which involves recognizing the potential of human re-sources as well as natural resources that can be utilized for the strengthening of RKP and its members. Through this approach, RKP can directly explore the potential that survivors of child marriage possess, breaking through social norms.

Community mobilization, the foundational step in community organization and development, operates on the belief that active participation of community members and groups (18), including organizations like Women's Leadership Houses (RKP), leads to increased effectiveness and efficiency in addressing problems. RKP, a community formed by those directly impacted by child marriage cases, plays a crucial role in this context. RKP empowers its members, making it easier for them to delve deeper into the root causes of child marriage and adolescent interactions within their communities. Central to this concept of community mobilization is the emphasis on (1) fostering community building and social capital within RKP to cultivate positive connections among its members, and (2) implementing empowerment-based interventions through RKP to strengthen community norms and enhance problem solving resources. In this manner, community mobilization, facilitated by RKP, operates as a coordinated process to comprehensively address the complex issues surrounding child marriage, including the dynamics of adolescent relationships within their environment.

The presence of RKP in two different villages has yielded varying outcomes, enabling both the community and stakeholders to grasp the underlying issues surrounding marriages within their respective environments. For instance, in one village within the Singosari District, it was found that the high prevalence of child marriage was attributed to the unrestricted social interactions among adolescents. Additionally, in this village, there is a recreational area where young people gather and engage in risky behavior, including premarital sexual activity. However, it's worth noting that this particular village has a strong religious influence, making the opinion of a religious leader more influential than that of an academic or an RKP member.

On the other hand, in a village located in the Karanglo District, child marriages predominantly occur due to economic pressures. Families in this village often convince their children that the only way to escape poverty is through marriage, even though parents end up financially supporting their married children. Furthermore, divorce rates in Malang Regency are also high among couples who marry before the age of 19. One reason is that husbands have to seek employment outside of Malang City, often leading to neglect of their children and spouses. Another contributing factor is emotional

instability among young couples, making divorce seem like an easier solution than resolving their marital issues. These diverse outcomes have enabled RKP to gain a deeper understanding of the root problems that need to be addressed first. RKP can now take steps to approach the community, especially parents, and discourage them from marrying their children under the age of 19.

4. Discussion and Analysis

4.1. Implications of Early Marriages on Women's Well-being and Status

In the context of women who marry early in Malang Regency, their financial stability is often contingent upon their parents. This reliance stems from several factors, notably the lack of steady employment opportunities for husbands, many of whom possess only a high school education. Even during proceedings for marriage age dispensation in religious courts, parents commonly assure the judge of their commitment to supporting their children's lives. This encompasses financial obligations toward their newlywed offspring and even their grandchildren, should their children conceive shortly after marriage. Men who marry early frequently face limited job prospects, often following their parents' vocational paths as farmers, laborers, or continuing family businesses. Additionally, most women who marry early in Malang Regency forego further education, assuming roles as homemakers and relying financially on their husbands and parents. Such educational and vocational constraints pose challenges for early-married women entering the workforce. Furthermore, the migration of husbands for employment opportunities outside the city disrupts family dynamics, with children losing paternal presence and often facing divorce if husbands fail to return or provide financial support.

Child marriage detrimentally impacts girls' educational opportunities, while enhanced educational access can mitigate the likelihood of early marriage. Estimates (19) scholarly discourse (20) underscore the crucial role of education in delaying marriage. Brown (21) advocates for examining tipping point policies in education to combat child marriage, including initiatives to alleviate secondary school transition costs for girls. This emphasis on educational interventions aligns with broader efforts to address the root causes of early marriage and promote gender equality. By investing in girls' education and reducing barriers to schooling, societies can empower young women to make informed choices about their futures and delay marriage until they are better prepared socially, economically, and emotionally.

When discussing the empowerment and knowledge aspects concerning women who marry early, it is evident that there are significant limitations in their understanding and awareness of their rights, including reproductive rights and health. Women who marry early often lack access to comprehensive information and education regarding their rights in various aspects of life. This lack of knowledge hampers their ability to make informed decisions and advocate for themselves effectively. Particularly concerning are issues related to reproductive health, where women may lack awareness of contraception methods, sexual health, and their rights in making choices regarding their bodies.

In general, the reductions in total fertility resulting from ending child marriage tend to be higher in countries with a higher prevalence of child marriage. This is simply because when a higher share of women marry as children, the marginal impact of ending child marriage on total fertility affects more women. This suggests that ending child marriage would significantly speed up the transitions to lower fertility rates in many countries. If contraceptive use were higher in countries with a high prevalence of child marriage, the impact of marrying early on fertility might be lower, as women would be able to manage their fertility better. Moreover, child marriage itself may affect contraceptive use.

By combining these insights, it becomes clear that addressing early marriage and enhancing women's access to comprehensive education and information on their rights, including reproductive health and rights, could play a crucial role in reducing total fertility rates. This approach would not only empower women but also contribute to a faster transition to lower fertility rates across countries with high instances of child marriage, potentially mitigating the broader impacts on women's health and societal development (22).

Limited access to reproductive healthcare significantly exacerbates the vulnerability of young mothers, particularly in light of the increased risk of complications during pregnancy and childbirth. Many women who marry and conceive at an early age experience various pregnancy complications, often necessitating emergency C-section deliveries due to the critical condition of the mother and baby. This gap in access to adequate reproductive healthcare affects not only the women themselves but also has profound implications for their offspring, especially those born to mothers under the age of 21. The adverse outcomes for children born to young mothers are well-documented, with higher risks of under-five malnutrition and mortality compared to children born to older mothers. This is partly because some young mothers may not be ready for childbirth, and when they are poorly nourished, it increases the risk of intrauterine growth restriction for their children. The long-term effects on children, such as stunting, can lead to a significant loss in productivity, with research suggesting

a loss of two percent or more for each percent loss in adult height, and micronutrient deficiencies have similar detrimental out-comes. This loss in productivity is substantial, with (23) estimating that undernutrition may lead to a loss of one-tenth of Gross Domestic Product in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia due to lost productivity. Therefore, addressing the gaps in knowledge and access to reproductive healthcare is crucial for empowering young women and safeguarding the well-being of both mothers and their children (24–30).

Early marriages significantly affect the future prospects, aspirations, and agency of young women, embedding deep-rooted gender inequalities and socio-economic disparities. Women entering into early marriages often see their opportunities for personal growth, education, and career advancement severely limited, confining them to traditional roles and restricting their professional fulfillment. This not only undermines their individual potential but also perpetuates cycles of ine-quality. Child brides, often young, poorly educated, and from disadvantaged backgrounds, find their agency and decision making capabilities further diminished within their marital households, impacting their access to healthcare and other critical life choices. The association of child marriage with losses in agency, as highlighted by (31) and (32), stems from a complex interplay of reduced educational opportunities, limited employment prospects, and diminished decision making power, ultimately affecting a woman's capacity for choice. This multifaceted impact underscores the need to address the underlying issues of child marriage to enhance women's empowerment and equality.

Furthermore, the generational impact of early marriages extends beyond the immediate consequences for the couples involved. Children born to parents who married early are at a higher risk of experiencing early marriages themselves. Growing up in environments where early marriage is normalized, these children face social and cultural pressures that influence their perceptions of marriage and relationships. Moreover, the lack of access to education and opportunities for personal growth within these households further exacerbates the cycle of poverty and limited prospects for future generations. Thus, addressing the root causes of early marriages and investing in initiatives that empower women and provide opportunities for education and economic independence are essential steps toward breaking this cycle and fostering a brighter future for generations to come.

The ultimate goal of addressing the multifaceted issues surrounding early marriages in Malang Regency and beyond is to empower young women through enhanced access to education, comprehensive information on their rights, and improved reproductive healthcare. By breaking the cycle of dependency and limited personal development,

these measures aim to foster greater economic independence, informed decision-making, and better health outcomes for women and their children. Ultimately, such efforts seek to eradicate gender inequalities, improve societal development, and ensure a brighter future for generations to come by ending the practice of child marriage and its associated impacts.

4.2. Effectiveness and Challenges of Community Mobilization through Women's Leadership House (RKP)

The integration of anti-child marriage interventions that emphasize altering community attitudes and behaviors is identified as the most effective strategy for combating child marriages. These interventions aim to shift societal norms and persuade communities to renounce the practice of child marriage, underscoring the importance of mobilization efforts in achieving these behavioral and attitudinal changes.

In the context of Malang Regency, the Women's Leadership House (RKP) represents a promising model for leveraging community mobilization to tackle the issue of early marriages. RKP functions as a vital platform for the empowerment of women and the promotion of gender equality, offering support, resources, and leadership training. This initiative enables women to participate in decision-making processes and champion their rights, thereby cultivating a community ethos of solidarity and collective action. Such efforts are crucial for addressing the underlying causes of early marriages and fostering community-wide support for change.

However, the journey towards altering entrenched cultural norms and practices that support early marriages is fraught with challenges. Overcoming these deep-rooted beliefs demands persistent efforts to question traditional gender roles and introduce new paradigms of women's empowerment and independence. Moreover, RKP contends with practical obstacles, including limited financial resources and logistical constraints, which can impede the effective execution of its initiatives. These challenges highlight the necessity for sustained support and strategic planning to ensure the success of community mobilization efforts in eradicating child marriages.

The lack of involvement of every relevant stakeholder could result in low coverage. Overreliance on a few mobilizers may indicate danger or a lack of innovations and could lead to rejection if issues of confidence arise. This can consequently lead to low mobilization or rejection. It's worth noting the poor performance of both the church and professionals who are supposed to be at the forefront of such initiatives, representing the civil society without vested interests unlike the political class. Specific community

mobilization interventions were explored in this study. The study findings established that the rescue of child marriage victims to centers by NGOs and other stakeholders has positively influenced curbing child marriages. However, the mobilization of communities to fight child marriage has faced many challenges, especially resentment, lack of funds, and suspicion among others.

Mobilizing the victims of child marriage by taking them to rescue centers seems to be an easy and immediate option for preventing child marriage according to NGOs and other non-state actors (33). However, this rescue mobilization intervention is not sustainable in the long run since it interferes with the family setup. This approach is not preferred by the government since it does not change community attitudes and behavior critical for long-term or sustainable child marriage mitigation. On the other hand, this intervention has benefits, such as removing the victims from society, reducing the likelihood of them being subjected to this vice, and at the same time giving them chances to continue their education or learn vocational skills.

Furthermore, RKP may encounter resistance from conservative elements within the community who oppose efforts to empower women and challenge existing power structures. Addressing this resistance requires strategic communication and engagement with key stakeholders, including religious and community leaders, to build consensus and garner support for gender equality initiatives.

Overall, while community mobilization through RKP offers a promising strategy for addressing early marriages, it requires a multi-faceted approach that addresses both cultural barriers and logistical challenges. By fostering collaboration and solidarity among women, empowering them with the necessary skills and resources, and engaging with key stakeholders, RKP can play a vital role in promoting gender equality and advancing the rights and well-being of women in Malang Regency. It is important to emphasize that in reality, the government and stakeholders at the district level in Malang are not aware of the issue of early marriages.

Community engagement plays a pivotal role in the efforts of Women's Leadership House (RKP) to combat early marriages in Malang Regency. The level of community involvement varies, with some individuals actively participating in RKP's initiatives, while others remain indifferent or resistant to change. Those who support RKP provide invaluable assistance by volunteering their time, resources, and expertise to promote gender equality and empower women within their communities. However, RKP also faces challenges in engaging the broader community, including skepticism or opposition from conservative factions and limited awareness of women's rights issues. Overcoming these challenges requires RKP to employ strategic communication strategies and

grassroots outreach efforts to build trust, raise awareness, and mobilize support for its initiatives.

Meanwhile, the impact of RKP on social norms surrounding early marriages is multifaceted. On one hand, RKP's advocacy and empowerment programs have contributed to positive shifts in social norms by challenging traditional gender roles and promoting alternative narratives of women's autonomy and empowerment. By providing women with the tools and resources to assert their rights and make informed decisions, RKP has empowered them to resist societal pressures and advocate for change. However, changing deeply entrenched social norms is a gradual process that requires sustained efforts and collaboration with various stakeholders. Some members of the community may resist RKP's efforts, viewing them as a threat to traditional values and beliefs. Addressing these concerns requires RKP to engage in dialogue, dispel misconceptions, and highlight the benefits of gender equality for the entire community. Ultimately, while RKP's impact on social norms may face resistance and challenges, its efforts are instrumental in creating a more equitable and just society for women in Malang Regency.

Based on the comprehensive discussion regarding the challenges and successes of the Women's Leadership House (RKP) in combating early marriages in Malang Regency, it is recommended that future interventions adopt a multifaceted and inclusive approach. This approach should prioritize the engagement and education of all relevant stakeholders, including men, boys, and community leaders, alongside empowering women and girls. To overcome cultural resistance and logistical challenges, strategies must incorporate sustained advocacy, capacity building, and awareness campaigns that address the root causes of early marriage, such as gender inequality and lack of education. Moreover, it is crucial to secure adequate funding and resources to support the scalability and sustainability of initiatives. Collaboration with local government, NGOs, and the international community can enhance the effectiveness of interventions by sharing best practices and leveraging additional support. To ensure long-term success, interventions should also focus on monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to adapt strategies based on feedback and changing community dynamics. By adopting these recommendations, stakeholders can significantly contribute to the eradication of child marriages and the advancement of gender equality in Malang Regency and beyond.

5. Conclusion

The study's findings illuminate the detrimental consequences of early marriages on the status and well-being of women in Malang Regency. The widespread occurrence of child marriages in rural areas constitutes a multifaceted social dilemma that reverberates throughout the entire community. Survivors of early marriages grapple with enduring economic, social, and generational repercussions, perpetuating the distressing cycle of early unions. In response to these challenges, the establishment of Women's Leadership Houses (RKP) in the Singosari and Karangploso regions has emerged as a pivotal force in advocating for gender equality and empowering women. RKP's innovative community mobilization approach has empowered its members to delve deep into the underlying causes of child marriage and adolescent dynamics within their communities. The outcomes of RKP's endeavors, as revealed in this study, are notably diverse, reflective of the distinct issues surrounding marriages in each unique environment. Central to RKP's strategy is a keen focus on problem identification and potential recognition. This involves not only recognizing the potential inherent in human and natural resources but also dismantling prevailing social norms that perpetuate early marriages. In summation, this study underscores the paramount importance of empowering women and advancing gender equality to address the intricate and deeply rooted issues associated with child marriage. By supporting initiatives like RKP and fostering collaborative efforts within communities, we can collectively strive towards a future where early marriages are but a relic of the past, and women are afforded the agency and opportunities they rightfully deserve.

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Declaration of Conflict Interest

The Author(s) declare(s) that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article

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