

Early Marriage among Madurese Community: A Case Study from the Gender and Development Perspectives

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Abstract: Early marriage is a significant social issue in Indonesia, particularly influenced by cultural expectations, family dynamics, and gender norms affecting young women. This study focuses on the Kraksaan region of Probolinggo, East Java, which the Madurese predominantly inhabit. A qualitative approach reveals that early marriage results from both parental decisions and young women's aspirations, suggesting a reciprocal relationship between their willingness to marry young and parents' perceived responsibilities in facilitating these unions. The normalization of early marriage within the social environment portrays post-marriage life as simple and appealing, contributing to its evolution into a generational pattern. To address this issue, the study calls for the Probolinggo government to enhance gender mainstreaming policies aimed at promoting gender equality, dismantling harmful stereotypes, and alleviating the long-term negative impacts of early marriage.

Keywords: early marriage; gender and development; Kraksaan; Madura ethnics; tradition

Abstrak: Pernikahan dini merupakan masalah sosial yang signifikan di Indonesia, terutama dipengaruhi oleh ekspektasi budaya, dinamika keluarga, dan norma gender yang memengaruhi perempuan muda. Penelitian ini berfokus pada wilayah Kraksaan di Probolinggo, Jawa Timur, yang mayoritas dihuni oleh etnis Madura. Pendekatan kualitatif menunjukkan bahwa pernikahan dini merupakan hasil dari keputusan orang tua sekaligus aspirasi perempuan muda, yang mengindikasikan adanya hubungan timbal balik antara kesediaan mereka untuk menikah di usia muda dan tanggung jawab yang dirasakan orang tua dalam memfasilitasi perkawinan tersebut. Normalisasi pernikahan dini dalam lingkungan sosial menggambarkan kehidupan pasca-pernikahan sebagai sesuatu yang sederhana dan menarik, sehingga berkontribusi pada perkembangannya menjadi pola antargenerasi. Untuk mengatasi masalah ini, penelitian ini menyerukan kepada Pemerintah Probolinggo untuk memperkuat kebijakan peng-arusutamaan gender yang bertujuan mempromosikan kesetaraan gender, menghapus stereotip yang merugikan, serta mengurangi dampak negatif jangka panjang dari pernikahan dini.

Kata Kunci: pernikahan dini; gender dan pembangunan; Kraksaan; etnis Madura; tradisi

A. Introduction

Early marriage is a practice of marriage conducted by men and women (generally girls) who are under the age of 18 (before reaching mental, physical, and psychological maturity).¹ Some of the factors that encourage early marriage are low education and knowledge,² economic conditions,³ culture,⁴ environment, and social life.⁵ The phenomenon of early marriage in Indonesia still occurs in several regions where the culture of early marriage remains strong, for example in Madura and Tana Toraja.⁶ As a result of early marriage, women face various risks in terms of maternal and infant health, mental health, the reinforcement of poverty, malnutrition, and mortality. Furthermore, early marriage deprives children of their rights to education, adolescent well-being, and a better future.⁷

To address early marriage, governments at various levels have established binding regulations and policies to reduce its rate. According to Law Number 16 of 2019 concerning Amendments to Marriage Law Number 1 of 1974, Article 7, paragraph 1, *'Marriage is only permitted when both the man and woman have reached the age of 19.'* Age restrictions that ensure both physical and spiritual maturity facilitate marriage, enabling its purpose to be realised without ending in divorce and producing healthy, high-quality offspring. However, established

¹ UNICEF, *Child Marriage in Eastern and Southern Africa: A Statistical Overview and Reflections on Ending the Practice* (New York: UNICEF, 2022), 96.

² Susheela Singh and Renee Samara, "Early Marriage among Women in Developing Countries," *International Family Planning Perspectives* 22, no. 4 (1996): 148, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2950812>; Naana Otoo-Oyortey and Sonita Pobi, "Early Marriage and Poverty: Exploring Links and Key Policy Issues," *Gender & Development* 11, no. 2 (2003): 42–51, <https://doi.org/10.1080/741954315>.

³ Shereen El Feki, "The Arab Bed Spring? Sexual Rights in Troubled Times across the Middle East and North Africa," *Reproductive Health Matters* 23, no. 46 (2015): 38–44, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rhm.2015.11.010>.

⁴ Dhonna Anggreni, Hari B. Notobroto, and Oedojo Soedirham, "Determinant Factors of Early Marriage in Developing Countries: A Literature Review," *Journal of Public Health in Africa* 14, no. 2 (2023): 10, <https://doi.org/10.4081/jphia.2023.2543>.

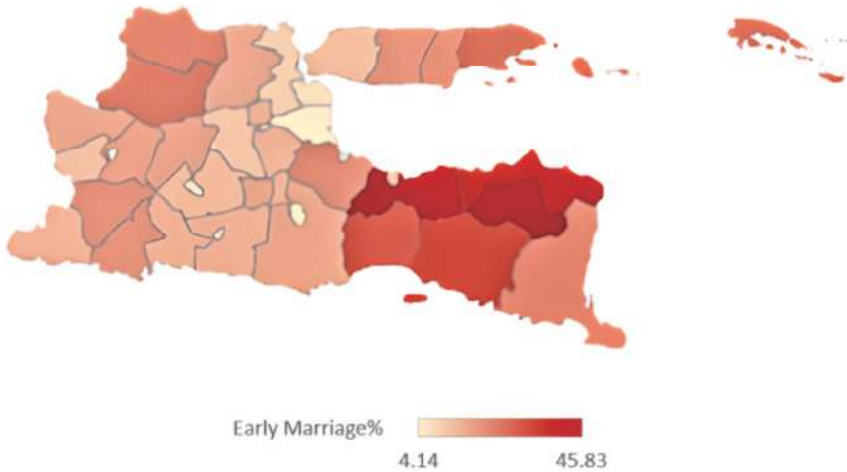
⁵ Maya Fitria et al., "Education Role in Early Marriage Prevention: Evidence from Indonesia's Rural Areas," *BMC Public Health* 24, no. 1 (2024): 3323, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-024-20775-4>.

⁶ Yudho Bawono, Dewi Retno Suminar, and Wiwin Hendriani, "The Life Experience of Ethnic Madurese Women in Early Marriage: A Phenomenological Study," *Mozaik Humaniora* 23, no. 1 (2023): 61–76, <https://doi.org/10.20473/mozaik.v23i1.37581>.

⁷ Anggreni, Notobroto, and Soedirham, "Determinant Factors of Early Marriage in Developing Countries: A Literature Review."

legal provisions cannot restrict norms, culture, and religion while still allowing early marriage.⁸

Figure 1
Percentage of Female Population Aged 10 Years and Over with Age at First Marriage below 17 Years in East Java



Source: Image designed by the author based on BPS data.⁹

In East Java (see Figure 1), the trend of early marriage among girls under the age of 17 in 2022 is still dominated by the *Tapal Kuda* region. Based on data from the Central Statistics Agency, the percentage of the female population aged 10 years and over with an age at first marriage below 17 years in several regions reached Bondowoso (45.83%), Probolinggo (41.61%), Jember (32.91%), Situbondo (37.99%), and Lumajang (29.98%).¹⁰ This phenomenon is

⁸ Shireen Kanji et al., "The Impact of Early Marriage on the Life Satisfaction, Education and Subjective Health of Young Women in India: A Longitudinal Analysis," *The Journal of Development Studies* 60, no. 5 (2024): 705–23, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2023.2284678>.

⁹ BPS Prov. Jawa Timur, "Persentase Penduduk Perempuan Usia 10 Tahun ke atas di Jawa Timur dengan Usia Kawin Pertama di bawah 17 Tahun Dirinci menurut Kabupaten/Kota, 2020-2022," BPS Prov. Jawa Timur, June 12, 2023, <https://jatim.bps.go.id/id/statistics-table/1/Mjg1MSMx/persentase-penduduk-perempuan-usia-10-tahun-ke-atas-di-jawa-timur--dengan-usia-kawin-pertama-di-bawah-17-tahun-dirinci-menurut-kabupaten-kota-2020-2022.html>.

¹⁰ BPS Prov. Jawa Timur.

associated with the preservation of ancestral traditions that encourage early marriage.¹¹

The marriage dispensation cases remain high despite the 2019 revision to Indonesia's Marriage Law, which raised the minimum marital age. Kraksaan, as the seat of the Religious Court that adjudicates all dispensation requests for the regency, offers both the clearest institutional record of the phenomenon and a population where early marriage is closely tied to the customs of the majority Madurese ethnic community a cultural dimension less examined in existing studies of early marriage in Java.¹² The location of Krasaan can be seen on Figure 2.

Figure 2
Map of Kraksaan, Probolinggo



Source: BPS data.¹³

¹¹ Bawono, Retno Suminar, and Hendriani, "The Life Experience of Ethnic Madurese Women in Early Marriage: A Phenomenological Study"; Yudho Bawono et al., "Budaya dan Pernikahan Dini di Indonesia," *Jurnal Dinamika Sosial Budaya* 24, no. 1 (2022): 83–91, <https://doi.org/10.26623/jdsbv.24i1.3508>; Halimatus Sakdiyah and Kustiawati Ningsih, "Mencegah Pernikahan Dini untuk Membentuk Generasi Berkualitas," *Masyarakat, Kebudayaan dan Politik* 26, no. 1 (2013): 35–54.

¹² Achmad Arianto, "Angka Pernikahan Dini Kabupaten Probolinggo Tertinggi Ketiga di Jatim," *Radar Bromo*, January 27, 2024, <https://radarbromo.jawapos.com/kraksaan/2401270007/angka-pernikahan-dini-kabupaten-probolinggo-tertinggi-ketiga-di-jatim>.

¹³ BPS Kabupaten Probolinggo, "Kabupaten Probolinggo dalam Angka 2021," BPS Kabupaten Probolinggo, February 26, 2021.

Several contemporary gender studies mention that early marriage is a common practice among the Madurese ethnic group. Several factors, including economic considerations and cultural traditions, drive this. This practice often begins with matchmaking and is influenced by the desire to improve social status and maintain family honor.¹⁴ Some families also manipulate age to meet legal requirements. In addition, patriarchal culture and religiosity¹⁵ contribute to early marriage among the Madurese ethnic group. The experience of early marriage for Madurese women is a complex process shaped by cultural beliefs, marriage-related perspectives, and conflict-management strategies.¹⁶

While prior qualitative research has examined early marriage among the Madurese in Madura Island and Jember,¹⁷ these studies have largely isolated single dimensions of the phenomenon psychological impact, gender inequality, or marital intention without situating early marriage within the broader structure of institutionalized gendered power that Gender and Development theory foregrounds. Moreover, none of these studies has been conducted in the Pandalungan region, despite the regency's persistently high dispensation rates, nor have they connected determinants of early marriage to the formal legal mechanism, the marriage dispensation process through which local institutions actively sanction or restrict it.

<https://probolinggokab.bps.go.id/id/publication/2021/02/26/a13bfacbd638105c3fa4ebe9/kabupaten-probolinggo-dalam-angka-2021.html>.

¹⁴ Nida Fitria Rahmadani and Ghina Farhany, "Proses Komunikasi dalam Pernikahan Etnis Madura," *Jurnal Interaksi: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi* 3, no. 2 (2019): 157–68, <https://doi.org/10.30596/interaksi.v3i2.3353>.

¹⁵ Annamaria Milazzo and Markus Goldstein, "Governance and Women's Economic and Political Participation: Power Inequalities, Formal Constraints and Norms," *The World Bank Research Observer* 34, no. 1 (2019): 34–64, <https://doi.org/10.1093/wbro/lky006>; Sudarso Sudarso, Phillipus Edy Keban, and Siti Mas'udah, "Gender, Religion and Patriarchy: The Educational Discrimination of Coastal Madurese Women, East Java," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 20, no. 9 (2019), <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol20/iss9/2/>.

¹⁶ Farida Nurani et al., "Social Capital Analysis of the Engagement Culture towards Reducing IMRs and MMRs: A Study of the Pandalungan Community. A Technical Note," *Australasian Accounting, Business and Finance Journal* 14, no. 1 (2020): 79–87, <https://doi.org/10.14453/aabfj.v14i1.8>.

¹⁷ Agoes Dariyo, Mia Hadiati, and R. Rahaditya, "Why Is the Tradition of Youth Married Sustained in the Madura Region?," in *Proceedings of the International Conference on Economics, Business, Social, and Humanities (ICEBSH 2021)*, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.210805.020>; Asrifia Ridwan, Isni Wahidiyah Susanto, and Alfiana Yuniar Rahmawati, "Alternative Policies for Handling Abhakalan Problem of Early Marriage in Madura," *Journal of Transformative Governance and Social Justice* 1, no. 2 (2023): 124–32, <https://doi.org/10.26905/j-tragos.v1i2.10208>.

This study is grounded in the Gender and Development (GAD) perspective, which analyses gender not as an individual attribute but as a relation of power embedded within social institutions, the family, religious, customary authority, and the state and which emerged as a shift away from earlier Women in Development (WID) approaches that treated women as an isolated target group rather than examining structural gender relations.¹⁸

Operationally, this study applies the Gender Analysis Pathway (GAP), a gender mainstreaming tool developed by Indonesia's National Development Planning Agency (BAPPENAS) in collaboration with the State Ministry for Women's Empowerment, and formalized through Presidential Instruction No. 9/2000 on Gender Mainstreaming in National Development. GAP translates the GAD perspective into a policy-analytical instrument by systematically examining gender gaps across four dimensions: access, participation, control, and benefit within a given development program or social issue.

Applying GAP to early marriage in the Pandalungan region allows this study to move beyond identifying determinants in the abstract and instead map how gendered access to education and economic resources, participation in marriage decisions, control over life choices, and the distribution of benefits and burdens after marriage jointly produce and sustain the practice. This framework directly informs both the analytical structure of the findings (organized around the problem tree and gap identification presented in Figures 4 and 5) and the policy recommendations that follow, since GAP is designed to translate gender analysis into actionable planning and monitoring steps for local government. Given this novelty, this study aims to analyze in depth the determinants of early marriage in the Pandalungan region of Probolinggo, particularly in Kraksaan, through a Gender and Development lens, using qualitative research. The empirical evidence from this study will inform local policymakers in strengthening requirements on early marriage to minimise long-term negative impacts.

¹⁸ Esther Miedema et al., "The Struggle for Public Recognition: Understanding Early Marriage through the Lens of Honour and Shame in Six Countries in South Asia and West Africa," *Progress in Development Studies* 20, no. 4 (2020): 328–46, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464993420977790>; Muhammad Yousif, "Early Marriages in Lower-Middle-Income Countries: A Serious Threat to Maternal–Child Health and Socio-Economic Sustainable Development," *Sustainable Development* 34, no. S1 (2026): 793–801, <https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.70207>; Devian Ayu Putri Efendi and Sri Wahyuningsih, "Understanding Gender Injustice in Early Marriage: Challenges Faced by Women," *Gender Equality: International Journal of Child and Gender Studies* 10, no. 1 (2024): 91, <https://doi.org/10.22373/equality.v10i1.22510>.

B. Method

Data Collection and Analysis

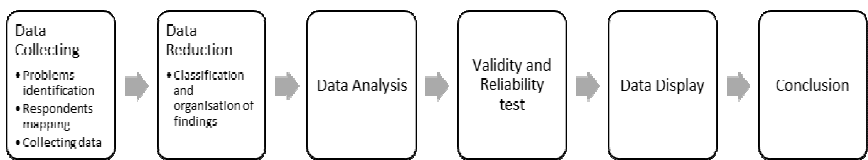
Kraksaan Sub-district lies within the Pandalungan cultural region, the eastern tip of Java (the “*tapal kuda*,” or horseshoe area comprising Probolinggo, Pasuruan, Situbondo, Bondowoso, Jember, and Lumajang), formed through sustained historical acculturation between migrant Madurese and Javanese populations.¹⁹ While often treated as broadly Madurese, cultural identity within this region is layered rather than singular, with individuals shifting between Madurese and Javanese-inflected identity depending on social context; this study focuses on informants who self-identify primarily with Madurese cultural and religious norms, consistent with the region’s historically dominant Madurese-descended population.

This study employs a qualitative case study design (see the data collection steps in Figure 3), using in-depth interviews to examine early marriage as it is practiced and to capture deeper perspectives within Kraksaan Sub-district, Probolinggo Regency. A case study design was selected because it allows for an in-depth, contextualized examination of a real-world phenomenon within its actual social and institutional setting, drawing on multiple informant perspectives: married couples who experienced early marriage, parents, local government officials, and village gender cadres rather than a single, homogeneous viewpoint.²⁰ This multi-perspective structure is particularly suited to the study’s subsequent aim of producing a Gender Analysis Pathway (GAP) model, since GAP requires triangulating access, participation, control, and benefit across different stakeholder groups within a bounded setting a requirement that a single perspective design such as phenomenology would not adequately support.

¹⁹ Nova Saha Fasadana and Soleehah Yunuh, “Intercultural Communication Approach of Tapal Kuda Pesantren in Overcoming Students Culture Shock,” *Komunike: Jurnal Komunikasi Penyiaran Islam* 16, no. 1 (2024): 71–84, <https://doi.org/10.20414/jurkom.v16i1.9401>; Kartika Bina Kasih and Clara Sinta Pratiwi, “Language, Tradition, and Identity: Cultural Acculturation in the Pandalungan Community of Jember Regency,” *Qomaruna* 2, no. 2 (2025): 126–35, <https://doi.org/10.62048/qjms.v2i2.84>.

²⁰ J. W. Creswell and J. D. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publication Inc., 2018), 178.

Figure 3
Data Collection and Analysis



Source: J. W. Creswell and J. D. Creswell.²¹

The Gender Analysis Pathway (GAP) is a tool for addressing gender gaps by examining women's and men's access, participation, control and benefits of development programs. GAP can help planners integrate a gender perspective into policy or development program design. GAP can be used to identify gender differences and gender issues. Additionally, developing development plans that consider gender aspects. GAP is part of strategies, programs, or interventions that address gender equality.²²

A total of 18 participants took part in this study: 16 individuals from married couples and their parents who had experienced early marriage and 2 village gender cadres. The respondents who were sampled in this study were couples who married before the legal minimum age of 19 and their parents of respondents who experienced similar early marriage incidents. Participant demographic characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Sampling Procedure

Participants were recruited using snowball sampling. This technique was selected because early marriage is a socially sensitive topic in the research setting, and individuals with direct experience of it or with privileged knowledge of local cases, such as gender cadres are not readily identifiable

²¹ Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 178.

²² Herien Puspitawati, "The Pro-Poor Planning and Budgeting Project - Working Paper No. 7: Kajian Kesejahteraan Keluarga dan Pemberdayaan Gender di Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Timur, Jawa Tengah dan Sumatera Selatan" (Jakarta: BAPPENAS, 2008), https://perpustakaan.bappenas.go.id/e-library/file_upload/koleksi/migrasi-data-publikasi/file/Unit_Kerja/Deputi_Bidang_Kependudukan_dan_Ketenagakerjaan/Direktorat-Penanggulangan-Kemiskinan-dan-Pemberdayaan-Masyarakat/Perencanaan-Pengembangan-dan-Pengelola.

through public records or random sampling; snowball sampling allowed the research team to reach participants through trusted community referrals, which was necessary to secure participants' willingness to discuss a sensitive personal experience.

This initial contact facilitated introductions by the cadres to two couples who had married early, who in turn referred the researchers to additional participants within their social networks. This chain-referral process is continued until the target composition of informants married couples, parents, local government officials, and gender cadres was achieved. Snowball sampling was considered appropriate for this study for two reasons: first, participants' willingness to discuss a sensitive personal experience was substantially higher when approached through a trusted referral rather than a cold approach; and second, this technique allowed the researchers to reach information-rich informants such as gender cadres with direct knowledge of multiple cases who would not have been identifiable through random or purposive sampling alone. To reduce the risk of over-representing a single-family network or viewpoint, the researchers [state your actual mitigation strategy e.g., "limited the number of participants recruited through any single referral chain to no more than two individuals" or "deliberately sought referrals across multiple hamlets (*dusun*) within the sub-district.

Validity and Reliability

To establish the trustworthiness of the findings, this study applied Lincoln and Guba's criteria of credibility, dependability, and confirmability.²³ Credibility was addressed through peer debriefing, in which two qualitative research experts (lecturers specializing in gender studies and qualitative methodology) independently reviewed the emerging categories and themes and discussed points of disagreement with the research team until consensus was reached. Dependability was reinforced through consistency in the interview protocol and coding process across all informant groups. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants before their involvement, in accordance with standard ethical procedure for qualitative research involving sensitive topics.

²³ Egon G. Guba and Yvonna S. Lincoln, "Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research," in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc., 1994), 105–17.

C. Result and Discussion

Participants' Characteristics

The characteristics of the informants in this study, by gender, comprised 18 people. Participants' ages ranged across several groups, with the largest proportion falling within the 21–30 age bracket and a mean age of 35 years, indicating that most informants were within their economically productive years. In terms of educational attainment, the largest group (10 informants) had completed senior high school. Regarding age at first marriage, informants married between 17 and 24 years, reflecting a relatively wide age range that includes both adolescent and early-adulthood marriages in the sample.

Table 1
Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Characteristics	Category	Total N = 18	
		n	Percentage
Sex	Men	7	38.9%
	Women	11	61.1%
Age group	10 – 20 years	4	22.2%
	21 – 30 years	6	33.3%
	31 – 40 years	2	11.1%
	41 – 50 years	2	11.1%
	51 – 60 years	4	22.2%
Education	Primary	2	11.1%
	Secondary	2	11.1%
	Tertiary	10	55.6%
	Vocational	1	5.6%
	Bachelor	3	16.7%

Socio-Geographical Conditions in Kraksaan, Probolinggo Regency

The Madurese ethnic group in the Pandhalungan region is characterised by a wide range of diversity, particularly in terms of early marriage customs. Early marriage in the Pandalungan Region (Kraksaan, Probolinggo) is characterised by

a disregard for age. This marriage culture is quite unique because early marriage in this region is considered normal by the community and has even become a tradition and an identity of the cultural diversity of the island of Madura.²⁴ Despite government regulations, this does not deter parents in Madura from marrying off their children at a young age. Because marriage is considered a sacred matter for the Madurese people. This is in line with the findings of Rofika and Hariastuti, who stated that early marriage among the Madurese ethnic group in Sumenep Regency differs from the culture of early marriage among the Madurese ethnic group in Probolinggo.²⁵ Based on the following analysis, the differences between early marriage in the Madura Island region and in Probolinggo are presented.

The findings of this study are interpreted through the gender and development perspective, using the four analytical dimensions of the Gender Analysis Pathway (GAP) access, participation, control, and benefit to explain how gendered power relations produce and sustain early marriage in Kraksaan (see in Table 2). Based on the results of the interviews conducted, early marriage can be classified into two categories (see Table 3): 1) Early marriage as a solution to a problem; and 2) Early marriage as part of preserving culture and the social environment. The following are the results of in-depth interviews with informants.

Early Marriage as a Solution to a Problem

Analysis of the interview results shows that early marriage is a cultural choice for parents in shaping their children's independence after graduating from senior high school. In this case, marriage (or the start of an independent life with a husband) can sometimes free a person from the family's poverty. Findings indicate that young women in Kraksaan have limited access to continued education once early marriage becomes a viable alternative pathway. This aligns with studies by Feki,²⁶ who identifies economic constraints as a key driver of

²⁴ Deni Setiawan et al., "Exploring Abhakalan Culture (Early Marriage) in Madura: A Dialogue of Customary Law, Religion, and The State," *Ahkam: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* 24, no. 2 (2024): 345–64, <https://doi.org/10.15408/ajis.v24i2.36070>.

²⁵ Ainur Mila Rofika and Iswari Hariastuti, "Social-Cultural Factors Affecting Child Marriage in Sumenep," *Jurnal Promkes* 8, no. 1 (2020): 12–20, <https://doi.org/10.20473/jpk.V8.I1.2020.12-20>.

²⁶ El Feki, "The Arab Bed Spring? Sexual Rights in Troubled Times across the Middle East and North Africa."

early marriage, but extends this literature by showing that the constraint operates specifically through unequal access to educational continuation for girls rather than for boys.

Table 2
Differences between Madurese Ethnic Communities in the Tapal Kuda Region and on
Madura Island

Aspect	The Madurese Ethnic Community in Sumenep	The Madurese Ethnic community in Kraksaan, Probolinggo
Marriage	Weddings in Madura can last 4-5 days with various traditions and traditional clothing. <i>The ontaran</i> tradition means 'to throw' in Indonesian, which has a subtle meaning or to shower with money	Weddings in Probolinggo are generally conducted with a marriage ceremony and reception. Some are even conducted only at the KUA (Office of Religious Affairs). There is no ontaran tradition in the Probolinggo region
Matchmaking	Madura is no stranger to the culture of marrying off or arranging marriages for children when they are still young	Marriages in Probolinggo are arranged when the couple reach adolescence and are ready to marry or marry a cousin
Culture	The Madurese ethnic community in Madura is generally more attached to Madurese traditions and culture as a whole. They maintain traditions such as <i>karapan sapi</i> (bull racing), Madurese mask dance, and various other cultural activities	The Madurese ethnic community in Probolinggo is more influenced by East Javanese culture in general, with the adoption of some local Probolinggo traditions
Language	Using Madurese language in daily interactions	Using Madurese-Javanese in everyday interactions. Although Indonesian is also used, Madurese remains the most widely used language in Probolinggo Regency, especially among the Madurese ethnic community.
Characteristics	Madura as a person who is tough, temperamental, but persistent, diligent, and pious	The Madurese community in Probolinggo Regency is known for being brave, assertive, and never giving up. If you hear people from Kraksaan talking for the first time, you might find it strange or surprising, because when they speak, their voices are loud and harsh (thus making them sound angry)

Source: Authors (from in depth interview analysis)

Table 3
Themes, Main Category, and Sub Category from Interview Results

Theme	Main Category	Sub Category
Determinants and Reason for early Marriage in Kraksaan	Early marriage as a solution to a problem	Improved living standards and escape from poverty
		Early marriage due to environmental and religious pressures
	Early marriage as part of preserving culture and the social environment	Early marriage to raise the social status of the family
		Lower understanding and knowledge
		Patriarchal and lack of choices for women

Social norms in this study's findings treat education as secondary for women after marriage, restricting girls' access to the same educational and career trajectories available to their male peers. This finding is consistent with Khairina et al.,²⁷ Adekoya and Sokunbi,²⁸ and Otoo-Oyortey and Pobi²⁹ who similarly link poverty to early marriage. However, this study identifies that the mechanism is not simply "poverty causes early marriage," but that poverty combined with gendered educational access forecloses girls' alternatives before marriage is even considered.

Improved Living Standards and Escape from Poverty

Children living below the poverty line often face pressure to marry at an early age, especially if their families view marriage as a source of financial security and economic stability. The study's results show that parents believe

²⁷ Najwa Khairina and Muhammad Azhar Tridharma Putra, "The Association between Early Marriage Decisions and Poverty Incidents in Indonesia," *Ekulibrium: Jurnal Ilmiah Bidang Ilmu Ekonomi* 18, no. 2 (2023): 227–36, <https://doi.org/10.24269/ekulibrium.v18i2.2023.pp227-236>.

²⁸ Adenuga Adekoya and Gbenro Sokunbi, "Early Marriage as a Determinant of Poverty in Nigeria," *Izvestiya Journal of the University of Economics - Varna* 65, no. 1 (2021): 102–19, <https://doi.org/10.36997/IJUEV2021.65.1.102>.

²⁹ Otoo-Oyortey and Pobi, "Early Marriage and Poverty: Exploring Links and Key Policy Issues."

that early marriage will provide financial stability for their children. They assume that by getting married, their children will have financial support from their spouse or their spouse's family. This section in line with studies from Stark,³⁰ Rashid et al.,³¹ and Yousif³² stated that early marriage is often chosen under economic stress as a protection or survival strategy, especially when parents cannot afford schooling, food, or household expenses.

"Ayu didn't continue her studies because she didn't have the money to go to college, so I introduced her to my friend. Her son also agreed to marry her last November."³³

"I didn't continue my studies, I stopped after high school because I didn't have the money to go to university, so I started working straight away. Someone wanted to propose to me, and I finally met his son a few months later, and we got married."³⁴

"Perhaps it was meant to be, so after graduating from high school, we got married. Thankfully, both my husband and I were able to find employment."³⁵

"*Alhamdulillah*, I am happy, my livelihood is stable, and both of them already have jobs, so there are no more burdens. Because they are taken care of by their husbands, they complement each other."³⁶

Early Marriage Due to Environmental and Religious Pressures

Children who are not yet emotionally and mentally mature tend to be more easily influenced by pressure from their surroundings or community stigma.³⁷ This affects the minds of both parents and children. This is because

³⁰ Laura Stark, "Early Marriage and Cultural Constructions of Adulthood in Two Slums in Dar Es Salaam," *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 20, no. 8 (2018): 888–901, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2017.1390162>.

³¹ Md. Mamunur Rashid et al., "Exploring Determinants of Early Marriage among Women in Bangladesh: A Multilevel Analysis," ed. Enamul Kabir, *PLoS One* 19, no. 10 (2024): e0312755, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0312755>.

³² Yousif, "Early Marriages in Lower-Middle-Income Countries: A Serious Threat to Maternal-Child Health and Socio-Economic Sustainable Development."

³³ OT5, X5, interview, February 21, 2023.

³⁴ PI5, X5, interview, February 21, 2023.

³⁵ PI4, X5, interview, February 26, 2023.

³⁶ OT4, X7, interview, February 26, 2023.

³⁷ Arne Huzaimah et al., "Controversy of Early Marriage Between Religious Doctrine and Customs in Minority Areas in Indonesia," *Jurnal Ilmiah Al-Syir'ah* 22, no. 2 (2024): 139, <https://doi.org/10.30984/jis.v22i2.2344>; Mohamad Rana, Tajul Arifin, and Cecep Soleh Kurniawan, "When Religion and Culture Meet Economy: Socio-Legal Factors for the Early Marriages of Muslim Families in Cirebon," *Al-Ahwal: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Islam* 15, no. 1 (2022): 83–102, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ahwal.2022.15105>.

marriage usually occurs when children have graduated from high school. They seek livelihoods or work only for their daily needs, without considering the future beyond the present. For example, one of the interviewees mentioned:

"My offspring and his father, if they don't continue their studies, will get married. The decision to marry was made by both families."³⁸

"My parents encouraged me, because I had just graduated from junior high school and wanted to work rather than continuing on to senior high school. I had known him for a long time, and my parents supported us. So when I met him again and we got along well, we ended up getting married. My husband works, and I am a housewife."³⁹

"Since my responsibility as a parent has been fulfilled, the benefits are that someone is there to accompany my child in their future life. I am old, so seeing my child through to marriage is already a great joy."⁴⁰

"Because the social rural environment here is strong and the people's mindset is also very realistic about early marriage, thus (early marriage is considered normal)."⁴¹

The results of the study indicate that informants who married early received encouragement from their parents or those around them. Parents believe that marrying young will provide their children with security and protection.⁴²

Early Marriage to Raise the Social Status of the Family

Some parents consider marriage a means of maintaining family honour or improving their social status.⁴³ Children who do not continue their education to a higher level, especially girls, will be introduced to potential partners or arranged marriages by their parents.⁴⁴ They believe that higher education is

³⁸ OT2, X6, interview, February 27, 2023.

³⁹ PI2, X6, interview, February 27, 2023.

⁴⁰ OT5, X9, interview, February 21, 2023.

⁴¹ KD2, Q1, interview, February 27, 2023.

⁴² Rana, Arifin, and Kurniawan, "When Religion and Culture Meet Economy: Socio-Legal Factors for the Early Marriages of Muslim Families in Cirebon"; Singgih Susilo et al., "Investigation of Early Marriage: A Phenomenology Study in the Society of Bawean Island, Indonesia," *Journal of Population and Social Studies* 29 (2021): 544–62, <https://doi.org/10.25133/JPSsv292021.034>.

⁴³ Shuge Wang, "The Impact of Early Marriage and Childbearing in Rural Areas on Women's Status in Society," *Journal of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences* 28 (2024): 420–24, <https://doi.org/10.54097/dy7cf122>; V. B. Nagaraj and P. Theboral, "Got Hitched Too Soon," *Asian Journal of Human Services* 27 (2024): 85–99, <https://doi.org/10.14391/ajhs.27.85>; Ach Nurhamid Awalluddin, "Pernikahan Dini dalam Perspektif Sosiologi," *Hoki: Journal of Islamic Family Law* 2, no. 2 (2024): 10–16, <https://doi.org/10.55352/hki.v2i2.1339>.

⁴⁴ Ahmed Abdus Saleh Saleheen et al., "Sociodemographic Factors and Early Marriage among Women in Bangladesh, Ghana and Iraq: An Illustration from Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey," *Heliyon* 7, no. 5 (2021): e07111, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e07111>.

unnecessary, they will be married off so that there is no further concern about the girl.

"I am happy that the burden of raising children is over. My children are married and at peace with their own choices, so I am content. As a parent, I am satisfied."⁴⁵

"If a girl in the village is not married and has not continued her education, she becomes the subject of gossip among the neighbours because she stays at home all the time. Her parents usually decide to marry her off. They ask her first if she agrees, and when she does, I introduce her to my friend's son. That's how it is in Madura, if you don't get married, you become known as an "old lady."⁴⁶

Early marriage as part of preserving culture and the social environment

Lack of knowledge and awareness about women's and children's rights has negative implications for early marriage.⁴⁷ Children from families with an intergenerational pattern of early marriage are more likely to repeat the practice.⁴⁸ These phenomena can increase health risks, limit access to education and career opportunities, and negatively affect psychological well-being.

Lower Understanding and Knowledge

The results of the study indicate that marriage at a very young age can cause significant psychological stress for the individual. Children who marry young tend to do so without considering what life will be like after marriage and their future, simply because they do not want to remain in a relationship for too long.

"They knew each other from school and got married right after graduation."⁴⁹

⁴⁵ OT1, X7, interview, February 27, 2023.

⁴⁶ OT5, X6, interview, February 27, 2023.

⁴⁷ Md. Nuruzzaman Khan et al., "Exploring the Impact of Perceived Early Marriage on Women's Education and Employment in Bangladesh through a Mixed-Methods Study," *Scientific Reports* 14, no. 1 (2024): 21683, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-024-73137-w>.

⁴⁸ Albina I. Shmakova, "Parenting and Family Relationships Factors in the Intergenerational Transmission of Partnerships: A Research Review," *Perspectives of Science and Education* 62, no. 2 (2023): 536–48, <https://doi.org/10.32744/pse.2023.2.31>; Serap Kavas, "Early Marriage and Motherhood from an Intergenerational Perspective: The Case of Turkey," *Population Research and Policy Review* 41, no. 5 (2022): 2143–75, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11113-022-09718-2>; Dyah Anantalia Widyastari, Pimonpan Isarabhakdi, and Zahroh Shaluhiah, "Intergenerational Patterns of Early Marriage and Childbearing in Rural Central Java, Indonesia," *Journal of Population and Social Studies* 28, no. 3 (2020): 250–64, <https://doi.org/10.25133/JPSv28n3.017>; Sara McLanahan and Larry Bumpass, "Intergenerational Consequences of Family Disruption," *American Journal of Sociology* 94, no. 1 (1988): 130–52, <https://doi.org/10.1086/228954>.

⁴⁹ PS1, X5 interview, February 27, 2023.

"The people here also think that way. It's understandable that they lack knowledge in a village like this. Not many people pursue higher education; only a few do."⁵⁰

"The community (in Kraksaan) is still traditional, that's all. You know how it is when the community has certain desires; they won't look to the outside world for comparison, but will just stay where they are. The obstacle has become a problem for all agencies because human resources in Kraksaan Subdistrict remain low. If we compare it with the city, there are still several different obstacles."⁵¹

The lack of understanding among the people of Kraksaan, who tend to make short-term decisions. Limited knowledge and awareness of the risks of early marriage result in parents thinking only of marrying off their daughters through arranged marriages, and the rights that should be determined by the children are instead determined by the parents.

Patriarchal and Lack of Choices for Women

Some women feel compelled to marry early under pressure from their families or communities, especially in areas where traditions and customs remain prominent.⁵² However, there are also women who choose to marry early because of personal desire or to obtain financial support from their partners or families.

"... Because marriage is a choice, if you want to get married, then go ahead, which means you are ready to accept the risks involved in marriage. Both girls and boys who want to get married must understand that, not just think about the good parts, because marriage definitely has its hardships. This mindset must be instilled from now on, meaning both the child and the parents must be in harmony, so they can think about the consequences of getting married young in the future, right?"⁵³

"... But what can you do? Everyone's fate is different. Thus, when people hear that someone is getting married, it's normal. It's so common here that sometimes you don't even hear about our neighbor wedding and suddenly they're already carrying a baby. It's totally normal."⁵⁴

"I didn't continue my studies, I stopped after high school because I didn't have the money to go to university, so I started working straight away. Someone wanted to propose to me, and I finally met his son a few months later and we got married."⁵⁵

⁵⁰ KD2, Q2, interview, February 27, 2023.

⁵¹ KD2, Q4, interview, February 27, 2023.

⁵² Mulya Syaddam Nirwan, "Early Marriage and Reproductive Health: A Scientific Study on Risks and Consequences," *Jurnal Riset Kualitatif dan Promosi Kesehatan* 2, no. 1 (2023): 54–66, <https://doi.org/10.61194/jrpkp.v2i1.663>.

⁵³ KD1, Q2, interview, February 26, 2023.

⁵⁴ KD1, Q1, interview, February 26, 2023.

⁵⁵ PI5, X5, interview, February 21, 2023.

Early marriage in Kraksaan is not a problem for the local community, as it is considered normal. It should be noted that families who do so must be prepared to take the risks involved, especially the couple who are getting married. Traditional thinking among the community has led to a lack of knowledge about early marriage. Even in terms of education, only a few people in Kraksaan can pursue higher education.

Early Marriage among Madurese: A Discussion

Based on in-depth interviews with informants, early marriage in Kraksaan, Probolinggo, was examined to determine the determinants of early marriage in the region and to formulate the Gender Analysis Pathway (GAP) model. The researcher categorized two outcomes: 'early marriage as a solution to a problem' and 'early marriage as part of the preservation of culture and social environment.' The conceptualization of these categories is based on the results of in-depth interviews that viewed early marriage from a multidimensional perspective.

In general, the Madurese community in Kraksaan does not object to early marriage among its members. It is because early marriage is not considered a bad thing that should be prohibited, but rather something that is considered normal by the community. Parents simply entrust the responsibility of providing for, protecting, supporting, educating, and granting all rights to their daughter to a man whom the parents have deemed trustworthy and capable of fulfilling all the needs of his future wife, as well as bearing the responsibilities entrusted to him.

In addition, the high rate of early marriage is also influenced by the low economic capacity of families, especially parents. This is in line with the finding by El Feki,⁵⁶ which shows that economic conditions are one factor that encourages early marriage. It is therefore not surprising that early marriage is common in rural areas that are relatively economically disadvantaged. As a result, many parents advise and even encourage their children to marry early, even though the children are not yet old enough to do so. The situation of families living below the poverty line forces parents to marry off their children quickly to ease the burden on the parents.

⁵⁶ El Feki, "The Arab Bed Spring? Sexual Rights in Troubled Times across the Middle East and North Africa."

Based on findings in the field, the lack of family support to continue education leads children to choose options that are common in their environment (early marriage). Social norms that consider education a secondary option for women after marriage can make it difficult for them to find support to continue their education or career. After marriage, girls who marry at an early age face heavy family responsibility, such as taking care of the household and having children.

Village gender cadres in Kraksaan revealed that the most difficult challenge faced by gender cadres and community empowerment is the cultural issues of the Madurese ethnic community, which does not yet support development progress, such as consumptive behaviour and a lack of future orientation, prioritising current needs, choosing to marry off their children at a young age, and the education of married children stopping at senior high school/vocational high school level.

The problem tree of factors contributing to early marriage in Kraksaan can be seen in Figure 4. The research findings indicate that educational, economic, and socio-cultural factors influence the high rate of early marriage in Kraksaan Sub-district, Probolinggo Regency. The consequences of early marriage in Kraksaan Sub-district affect reproductive health and marital stability. The results of this study also confirm previous research by Poppel et al.,⁵⁷ which indicates that differing perceptions of marriage significantly influence the rights of children, particularly girls, in achieving gender equality.

Furthermore, Figure 5 presents the identification of problems by looking at the factors of access, participation, control and benefits gaps. In this case, gender analysis pathways can assist in the process or method of systematically analysing data and information on the position of men and women, starting from identification, disclosure, functions, roles and responsibilities in the development process.

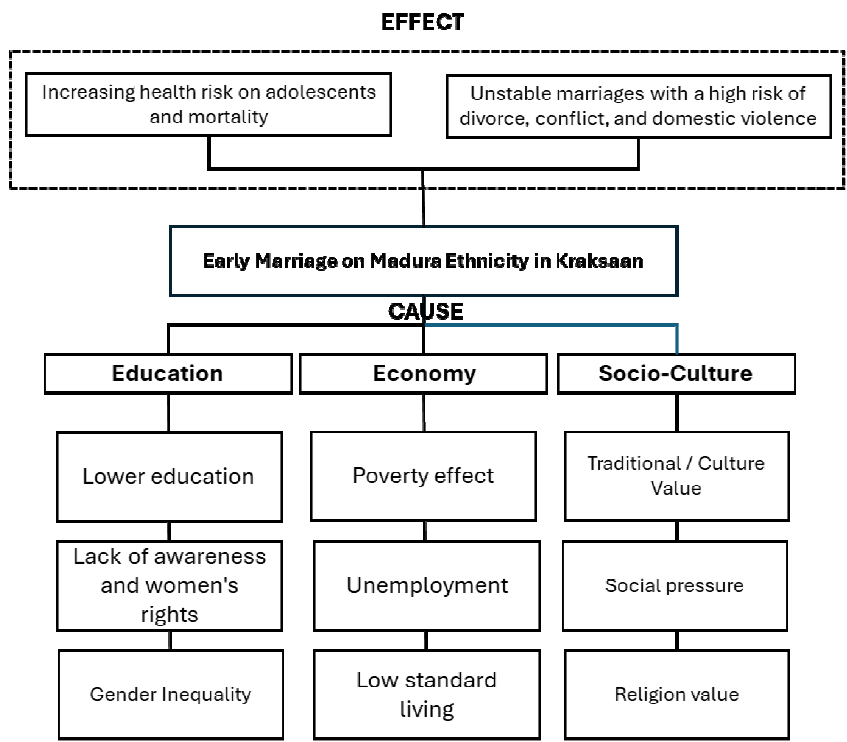
After conducting a Gender Analysis Pathway (GAP) model gap factor analysis, the results of the analysis were incorporated into an action programme matrix containing the steps or interventions to be implemented in the working area, as described in Figures 4. Various program experiences show that the implementation of various gender mainstreaming activities in the community has not been sustainable and still lacks synergy with local implementing agencies,

⁵⁷ Frans van Poppel, Christiaan Monden, and Kees Mandemakers, "Marriage Timing over the Generations," *Human Nature* 19, no. 1 (2008): 7–22, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12110-008-9033-5>.

thus it stops when the activity facilitators are no longer in the community. This is one of the reasons why the benefits of various gender mainstreaming activities carried out by gender cadres in Kraksaan have not been optimal.

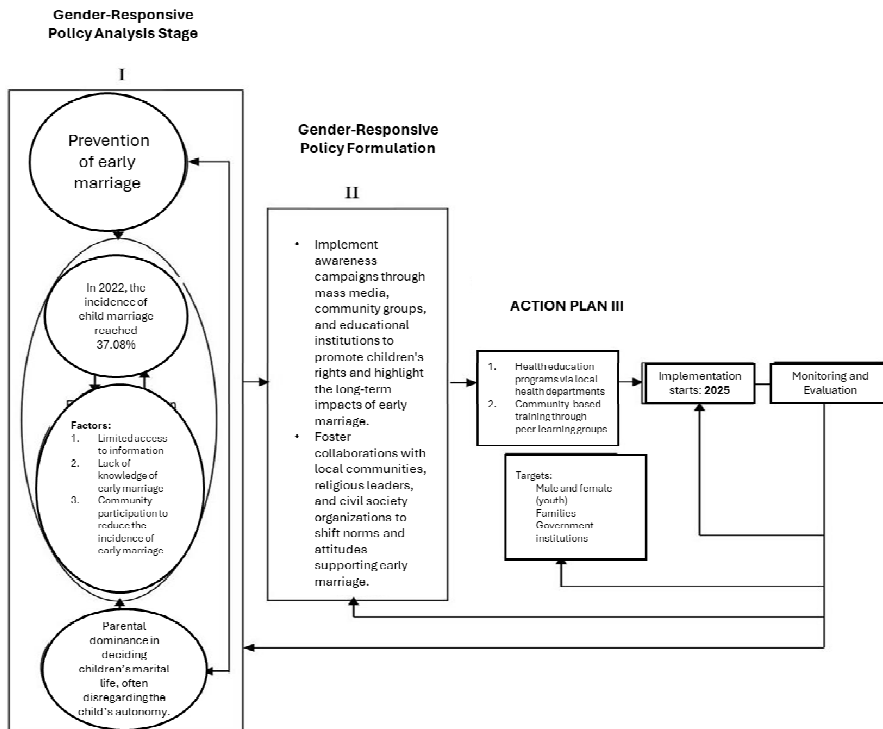
Based on gender analysis pathway (GAP), it is necessary to pay attention to gender dimensions in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of programmes to prevent early marriage and reduce stunting rates in Kraksaan. By considering gender differences and promoting equality, these programmes can become more inclusive, effective, and sustainable in achieving their goals. Strategic policies or programmes are needed to address early marriage and reduce stunting rates. This refers to one of the programmes in Surabaya City that can be adapted and implemented in Kraksaan, namely the Pre-Marriage School.

Figure 4
Identification of Gender Analysis Pathway (GAP) Model Issues
Using Problem Trees



Source: Authors

Figure 5
Policy Analysis Workflow Prevention of Early Marriage



Source: Authors

Other strategies to reduce the intention of early marriage include increasing digital literacy, youth engagement, and counter-messaging. Although these strategies may produce mixed effects, studies found that mass media, WhatsApp discussions, Instagram education, digital news, and media-literate religious counselling improved knowledge or were associated with a lower risk of early marriage.⁵⁸ However, digital media can also increase intentions when it

⁵⁸ Devika Mehra et al., "Effectiveness of a Community Based Intervention to Delay Early Marriage, Early Pregnancy and Improve School Retention among Adolescents in India," *BMC Public Health* 18, no. 1 (2018): 732, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-018-5586-3>; Naurah Lisnarini et al., "Health Promotion and Premarital Education for Adolescents on Instagram @siapnikah_official,"

romanticises young marriage, creates echo chambers, or spreads misinformation in conditions of low digital literacy.⁵⁹

D. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that early marriage in Kraksaan cannot be reduced to a single causal narrative. Rather than being solely a matter of parental imposition or rigid customary practice, findings show that early marriage functions in two interwoven ways within the Madurese community 1) as a pragmatic solution to economic hardship and limited educational prospects, and 2) as a socially normalised practice sustained by the community's own value system, in which marrying a daughter to a capable, trustworthy man is understood as the fulfilment of parental responsibility rather than a constraint imposed on her. This dual character early marriage as both problem-solving strategy and cultural preservation complicates the assumption in much prior literature that early marriage in Madurese communities is driven primarily by rigid adherence to tradition; instead, it is sustained by an environment in which marrying young is rarely questioned because the alternatives (continued education, delayed marriage) carry no comparable social value.

The study's key contribution lies in translating these qualitative determinants into a structured, actionable gender-planning tool through the Gender Analysis Pathway (GAP) model mapping how access, participation, control, and benefit gaps between men and women operate across the educational, economic, and socio-cultural dimensions identified in the findings.

Practically, these findings indicate that existing gender mainstreaming efforts in Probolinggo, while addressing structural conditions such as poverty and minimum marriage age regulation, are unlikely to shift outcomes on their

COMMICAST 5, no. 3 (2024): 178–98, <https://doi.org/10.12928/commicast.v5i3.12159>; Intan Agilliana et al., "Early Marriage among Generation Z Women in Indonesia: A Systematic Literature Review," *Women, Education, and Social Welfare* 1, no. 2 (2024): 98–109, <https://doi.org/10.70211/wesw.v1i2.295>; Nurul Hidayanti Mahas et al., "Educational Transformation as a Strategic Solution to Prevent Early Marriage: A Quantitative Study among Senior High School Students," *ETDC: Indonesian Journal of Research and Educational Review* 5, no. 4 (2026): 2223–33, <https://doi.org/10.51574/ijrer.v5i4.4862>.

⁵⁹ Dewi Novianti et al., "Social Media and Early Marriage During the Covid-19 Pandemic in Indonesia," *Journal of Social and Political Sciences* 6, no. 4 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.31014/aior.1991.06.04.443>.

own if they do not also address the normalisation processes documented in this study. The adaptation of pre-marital education models such as Surabaya's Pre-Marriage School and increasing the digital literacy structured around the GAP framework identified here, offers one concrete pathway provided it is paired with sustained institutional support, rather than the facilitator-dependent implementation that has limited previous gender mainstreaming activities in the region. Breaking the intergenerational pattern of early marriage in Kraksaan will require addressing not only its economic and educational preconditions, but the social normalisation that makes it appear, to both parents and daughters, as an unremarkable choice.[s]

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