

Psychological Well-Being of Individuals in Early Marriages and the Causal Factors: A Systematic Literature Review

Fetty Alfiya¹, Salsabila Zahra Nur Aulia²,
Suci Helga Papuani Simbiak³, Dinie Ratri Desiningrum⁴

fettyalfiya@students.undip.ac.id¹, salsabilazahr@students.undip.ac.id²
sucihelga@students.undip.ac.id³, diniedesiningrum@lecturer.undip.ac.id⁴

Faculty of Psychology, Diponegoro University, Indonesia

Abstract. Early marriage is a complex phenomenon that has significant impacts on individuals, families, and society. This systematic review aims to explore the various drivers of early marriage as they relate to psychological well-being. PRISMA 2018 was used in this study by reviewing research articles published from 2015-2024, the keywords used to search for article were “Psychological Well-Being“ AND “Risk Factor” AND “Early Marriage” OR “Child Marriage”, through Scopus, Science Direct, Ebsco Host, Springer Link, JSTOR, Pubmed, Research Gate, and Emerald databases. Nine articles were found to meet the inclusion criteria. This study found that early marriage is influenced by low education, cultural, economic, social, family support, strong religious influence, and living in rural areas. The low level of psychological well-being as a result of early marriage found in women is influenced by expectations from partners to become mothers and housekeepers. At the same time, young people are not emotionally or psychologically ready to take on this role, and financial dependence on partners increases oppression or domestic violence. Further research is needed to examine the psychological well-being of men who enter early marriage from different countries.

Keywords: Early Marriage; Factor; Psychological Well-Being; Systematic Literature Review

1 Introduction

Marriage is the physical and mental closeness between a man and a woman recognized as husband and wife based on Law No. 1 of 1974 on the Indonesian constitution. The main goal is to form a joyful and lasting family based on high spiritual values [1]. Getting married and building a family is part of the journey to maturity in the age range of 20-45 years. In this phase, a person has reached both physical and psychological maturity sufficient to make important decisions in his or her life, including choosing a life partner [2], [3]. Based on research from BKKBN (2024)¹, ideally, a man should marry at 25 years old and a woman at 21 years old.

¹ Legalitas.org, “Usia ideal menikah: Calon pengantin wajib tahu,” 2024, <https://legalitas.org/tulisan-ideal-menikah-calon-pengantin-wajib-tahu>.

However, there are still people who marry below the age limit that is considered ideal; this kind of situation is known as underage marriage or early marriage. Early marriage is a situation where a person marries before the age of 18 [4]. While both men and women can marry at an early age, in some countries, more women tend to marry at a young age than men and often with older partners [5].

As for now, reviewing data from UNICEF (2021), it is estimated that around 640 million girls around the world are forced to marry before reaching the age of 18; in more detail, every year, there are around 12 million children who are forced to marry². For example, when viewed by region, according to Naurah (2023), information from UNICEF Goodstats data, the rate of marriage in girls occurs in Nigeria, and the percentage in the country from the West African region reached 76% of the data in 2015-2021. Even research by Abera et al., (2020) mentions that more than half of married girls aged 15-19 have husbands at least ten years older than their age. After Nigeria, the Central African Republic, and Chad, the percentage of girls married at an early age reached 60%, while Mali and Mozambique recorded 54% and 53% respectively [7]. In Indonesia, during the issue of reducing the national rate to 7.5% by 2023, it turns out that it is still faced with the problem of marriage at the age of children under 18 years. Based on UNICEF data, Indonesia is ranked eighth globally and 2nd in ASEAN, with the highest number of early marriages at 1,459,000 cases [8].

According to Pohan (2017), early marriage can be influenced by various factors such as level of education, knowledge, employment, economic status, culture, promiscuity, and mass media³. The social media factor in this digitalization era can have good and bad effects on its users. The negative impact that arises is the occurrence of behaviors that are not following norms, such as accessing various things, including content related to sex and the like, resulting in premarital sexual behavior, which is often found in the surrounding environment so that early marriage can occur [10]. In addition, it is influenced by parental factors [11]. The low level of education of both children and parents causes a narrow mindset of not thinking about the future, which causes a lack of knowledge about the impact or risk of early marriage [12].

The factors of early marriage have become a global issue, reflecting concerns about the potential impact on public health. Suppose the incidence of early marriage continues to increase. In that case, the main problem will certainly be the negative impact on maternal and child health, even the risk of increased maternal and infant mortality due to pregnancy complications, increased likelihood of sexually transmitted diseases, cervical cancer, stunting, and malnutrition in children born [13]–[15].

Psychologically, marriage should ideally provide benefits and positive impacts for the couple. Marriage can potentially improve psychological well-being because it provides social support that is important to individuals [16]. High psychological well-being can reduce the risk of depression and mental disorders if the marriage has good quality [17]. Marital quality

² UNICEF. "Towards Ending Child Marriage." Unicef for every child, 2021. <https://data.unicef.org/resources/towards-ending-child-marriage/>.

³ Pohan, Nazli Halawani. "Faktor - faktor yang berhubungan dengan pernikahan usia dini terhadap remaja putri." *Jurnal Endurance* 2, no. 3 (2017): 424–35. <https://doi.org/10.22216/jen.v2i3.1172>.

includes happiness, satisfaction, and commitment to maintain the relationship [18]. However, in reality, girls who marry early are more vulnerable to domestic violence [19], [20] and early marriage also has an impact on reducing women's psychological well-being (John et al., 2019).

Decreased psychological well-being in women makes individuals more vulnerable to mental health disorders, further compounded by the disadvantages experienced as age, gender, marital status, and socioeconomic background require women to transition to adult roles and responsibilities suddenly. At the same time, girls may not be developmentally mature enough to cope with such responsibilities [22].

While early marriage has been the main focus of many studies to understand the factors influencing this phenomenon, there needs to be more literature on the relationship between psychological well-being and early marriage. Therefore, this literature review study explores the various drivers of early marriage related to psychological well-being.

2 Method

1. Objectives

This research uses the SLR (*Study Literature Review*) methodology to review psychological well-being in early marriage and its causal factors. The research guidelines are *Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses* (PRISMA).

2. Search strategy

Researchers conducted a literature review search published within the last ten years, between 2015 and 2024, through *Scopus*, *Science Direct*, *Ebsco Host Springer Link*, *JSTOR*, *Pubmed*, *Research Gate* and *Emerald* databases with a combination of keywords. The combination of keywords that researchers use is (“*Psychological Well-Being*“ AND “*Risk Factor*” AND “*Early Marriage*” OR “*Child Marriage*”). The literature search was conducted by researchers from March 25-30, 2024.

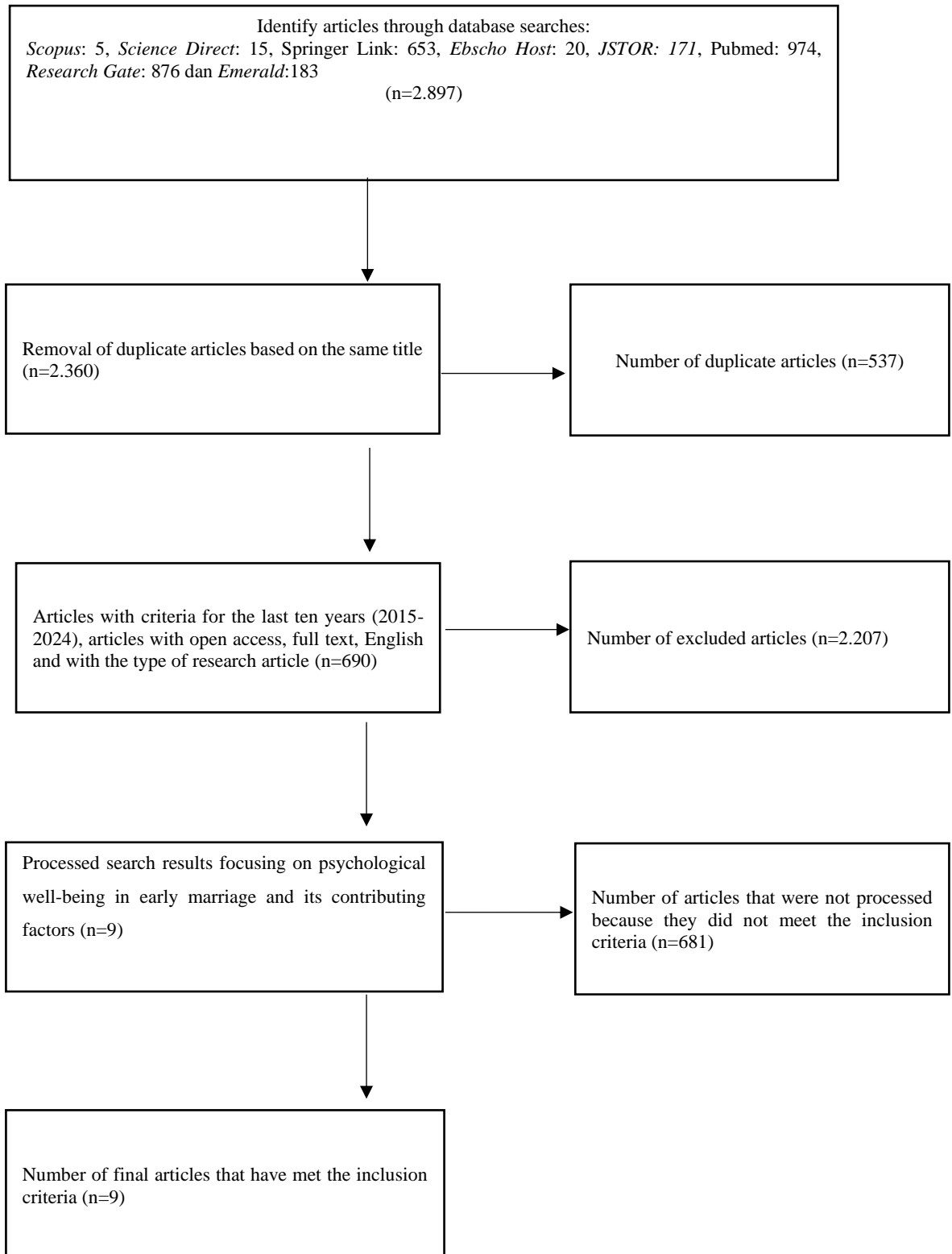
3. Inclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria are parameters for selecting literature to be reviewed. The inclusion criteria set in this study are: a) articles of the last ten years, b) articles with open access and full-text availability, c) research articles in English, d) research articles, and e) articles that discuss psychological well-being in early marriage and its causal factors.

4. Data extraction

The main data extracted from each article were research design, background, objectives, methods, subjects who married early, year of publication, findings, and conclusions.

3 Procedure



4 Result

Table 1. Characteristic review result

<i>Author</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Partisipants</i>	<i>Method</i>	<i>Result</i>
Charisma et al., (2024)	<i>Child-Marriage: Knowledge, Parent-Child Communication in Kubu Raya, Kalimantan Barat</i>	Pontianak, Indonesia	10 parents with children who decided to marry early	Qualitative	It was found that factors influencing early marriage 1) education: low education in children correlates with low education levels of parents. 2) age: Children adjust to the age of parents who marry early; some individuals want to try a new life. 3) Information or mass media: lack of filtering information obtained, such as imitating unhealthy dating styles, and the six subjects said they did not know the impact of early marriage. 4) social, cultural, and economic: There is an assumption that getting married at the age of 20 and above is considered an old maid; low economic conditions make individuals unable to continue their education. 4) environment: Relationships from the effects of dating to pregnancy outside of marriage cause early marriage to occur. 5) Experience: Parents tell their children about their marriage experience, which makes them want to marry early.
Rizkiani et al., (2023)	<i>The Psychological Well-Being of Young Women Entering into Child Marriages</i>	Kupang, Indonesia	3 Participants	Qualitative-phenomenology ; interviews and documentation	It was found that women who underwent early marriage faced challenges such as difficulty in adjusting to their roles as wives and mothers, feeling stressed, depressed, and struggling to cope with pressure. The participants regretted their decision to marry early and had difficulty relating to others. Factors such as age, limited education, environmental influences, and social support played an important role in shaping their psychological well-being. This research highlights the importance of understanding the experiences and emotions of young women in child marriage to address potential problems and promote better outcomes.
John et al., (2023)	<i>Do Gender-Based Pathways Influence Mental Health? Examining the Linkages Between Early Child Marriage, Intimate</i>	Ethiopia, Afrika	969 participants (18-24 years old)	Quantitative; Cross-sectional	Results from this study indicate that early marriage is associated with reduced psychological well-being among young women in Ethiopia. Mediation analysis suggests that increased exposure to intimate partner violence among those married at an early age is an important factor influencing the relationship between early marriage and psychological well-being. This research provides a deeper understanding of how gender-based pathways affect psychological well-being over time.
Apatinga et al., (2024)	<i>'Because of Cows': Exploring Factors Influencing Child Marriage</i>	Bawku, Ghana	15 Participants	Qualitative/ In-depth interview;	The findings in this study show that child marriage is common in the study area and has several drivers, including community/social factors such as poverty and dowry payments. Other drivers include teenage pregnancy and low education levels. The results support a social-ecological model in which

	<i>among Women in the Bawku West District, Ghana</i>			<i>purposive sampling</i>	child marriage has influences at multiple levels. The findings suggest that addressing child marriage in Ghana requires practical solutions across all sectors and levels.
Hosseini & Asadisarvestani (2022)	<i>Reasons for early marriage of women in Zahedan, Iran: a qualitative study</i>	Zahedan, Iran	36 Participants	Qualitative/ <i>Purposive sampling</i>	This study identified three main categories of reasons for early marriage in Zahedan, Iran: (1) early marriage as a transcendental imposition, (2) early marriage as a solution or type of problem-solving, and (3) early marriage as a voluntary act. The research provides a diverse picture of the perspectives and experiences of women who married early and illustrated the complexities and implications of early marriage in the region.
Sudarso et al., (2020)	<i>Early marriage and women's empowerment in rural areas</i>	Jawa Timur, Indonesia	100 participants consisting of girls who married early, parents who married early girls, community leaders, village officials, religious leaders, leaders of local organizations, and teachers.	Qualitative	The findings of this study show that the factors influencing early marriage in rural Java are cultural, social, and economic conditions. Patriarchal culture, women's powerlessness, and poverty are the biggest obstacles to gender equality. Javanese and Madurese cultures that adhere to patriarchal values view women only as human beings who have economic value. These patriarchal values are acquired by community members, starting from the socialization process in the family environment to the community, then becoming the perspective and beliefs of the Javanese and Madurese communities. Women, especially girls in rural areas, cannot fight alone to show their power in the public sphere. This situation arises because of the strong patriarchal culture that refers to the thoughts and actions that exist in society that value men more than women. Therefore, the first step is to reconstruct public awareness that women also have an important role in family and community development by revitalizing existing social institutions in rural communities.
John et al., (2019)	<i>Child marriage and psychological well-being in Niger and Ethiopia</i>	Nigeria and Ethiopia	2,764 women in Nigeria and 4,149 women in Ethiopia. In-depth interviews were conducted with ever-married women aged 18-45, married before the age of 18, and married for at least 5 years.	Quantitative and qualitative (in-depth interviews)	The results of this study showed that there is a significant negative relationship between early marriage (marriage at age 15 years or earlier) and overall psychological well-being in Nigeria and Ethiopia. All subdomains of psychological well-being except self-control were negatively associated with early marriage. These subdomains were depression, anxiety, positive well-being, vitality, and general health. Moreover, in the qualitative analysis, young brides in Ethiopia reported suffering from emotional distress and depression caused by the burden of handling marital responsibilities at an early age.

Anggraini et al., (2019)	<i>Factors affecting early marriage among female adolescents: A path analysis evidence from Blora, Central Java</i>	Blora, Jawa Tengah	200 married women within 5 years who were selected using random sampling technique.	Quantitative; <i>cross-sectional</i>	The results show that strong intention and low family income increase the likelihood of early marriage. Decreasing the likelihood of early marriage occurs due to the weak status of girls in the family and strong peer support not to marry early. Community culture, family support, attitudes, perceived behavioral control, and subjective norms indirectly influence early marriage.
Berliana et al., (2018)	<i>Determinants of early marriage among female adolescent in Indonesia</i>	Indonesia	The Indonesian Demographic and Health Survey (SDKI) among women aged 15-19 years totaled 7207 participants.	2012 Quantitative	The results showed that four factors were significantly associated with early marriage among adolescent women. First, women who did not finish elementary school tended to marry early more often than women who finished high school. Second, less well-off women tend to marry earlier than women with high socioeconomic status. Third, women who live in rural areas are more vulnerable to early marriage than women who live in urban areas. Fourth, knowledgeable women are less likely to marry early than women who do not have access to media information.

4 Discussion

Every human being is created in pairs; hence, there is a need for a legal bond through religion and state called marriage. However, not all marriages occur at the right time; some individuals marry before reaching an age considered mature and ideal, known as early marriage. Early marriage is between a man and a woman whose age is still classified as a child or teenager, even though these individuals are not advised to marry and start a family because of their young age [32]. Many couples marry at a very young age, especially in developing countries such as Indonesia [33].

Psychologically, according to Dariyo et al. (2020), an adolescent still needs to develop cognitive, affective, and communicative aspects to be ready as an adult to take on the responsibilities of marriage. It is necessary to prepare carefully to enter married life⁴. This view is in line with the opinion of Santrock (2014), who explains that marriage is a developmental task in adulthood, not in childhood or adolescence. The ideal period for marriage is early adulthood, namely 20-40 years (Papalia et al., 1998) or 18-40 years [37]. Early marriage is certainly caused by various factors that influence it; a literature review study conducted aims to understand better the factors that encourage early marriage, which will be described as follows:

1. Lower educational background

According to Ningsih and Rahmadi (2020), low education is a major factor in early marriage due to the mindset of those who think life will be better after marriage. However, they do not pay attention to the health, psychological, and social risks associated with early marriage⁵. Usually, individuals who enter into early marriages have dropped out of school and do not want to continue their education just because they work for a while to get money and get married. Such a mindset needs to be considered so that the tradition of early marriage can be straightened out.

2. Culture

Culture is a complex whole, including beliefs, arts, morals, science, law, customs, and human habits found in society [39]. This factor influences early marriage because the community thinks that if a child is close to the age of 20 but not married, it will be considered an old maid. There are indeed several families whose tradition is to marry young so that children automatically follow the tradition [11], [40], [41].

3. Economic status

The family economy is far from sufficient, so individuals think that getting married will fulfill the cost of living financially because there will be someone who provides for their lives. Parents also think that marrying off their children will reduce their dependents and help them economically, but in reality, early marriage is a factor in increasing the poverty rate in Indonesia [42].

4. Social status

⁴ Dariyo, Agoes, Mia Hadiati, and R Rahaditya. "Pemahaman undang-undang perkawinan terhadap penundaan perkawinan usia dini di Indonesia." *Journal An-Nafs: Kajian Penelitian Psikologi* 5, no. 1 (2020): 25–37. <https://doi.org/10.33367/psi.v5i1.928>.

⁵ Ningsih, Dewi Puspita, and Didin Septa Rahmadi. "Dampak pernikahan dini di Desa Keruak Kecamatan Keruak Kabupaten Lombok Timur." *Jurnal Ilmiah Mandala Education* 6, no. 2 (2020): 404–14. <https://doi.org/10.58258/jime.v6i2.1452>.

The social situation with the family system, known as patrilineal descent, positions a man above a woman in social roles. In this system, a woman is often sacrificed for the benefit of men who hold higher power and authority and are responsible for the family. The superior burden is that men get more priority and roles in society. For example, men are seen as more responsible in public affairs and women in domestic affairs. In terms of education, men in low-income families will be prioritized to go to school, and even though the quality of women is more eager and smart in education, this kind of social situation encourages early marriage, especially for women. [11], [43].

5. Family support

Marriage should be consented to by both partners, but in reality, the element of family interference is difficult to avoid; marriage consent often accumulates from pressure or coercion from parents or guardians so that children agree as a form of respect and devotion to parents [44]

6. Strong religious influence

Religious understanding from families who understand that in Islam, there is no age limit for marriage; the most important thing is that it is mumayyiz (baligh and sensible) is suitable for marriage [45]. However, sometimes, each individual lacks an in-depth understanding, and this view often does not consider aspects of children's psychological and emotional development; even though a child may be religiously mature, this does not mean they are ready to face the responsibilities and challenges of married life. It is important to emphasize that sexual maturity or puberty should not be the only criterion for determining marriage readiness.

7. Living in rural areas

According to Pohan (2017), people living in rural areas still hold strong socio-religious values that justify the tradition of early marriage. Based on the research results. Parents in Madopolo Village think that a woman who does not go to school is considered to have no burden of responsibility or work, rather than just sitting at home and doing activities outside the home and having closeness to men is better married off [43].

While early marriage is a complex phenomenon and deserves special attention, it is important to understand that education has tremendous power to change mindsets about it. Through education, individuals and communities can gain a deeper understanding of the risks and consequences of early marriage, especially parents who play a role in shaping the family environment to support children's optimal development and make wise decisions about marriage [46], [47].

However, this becomes contradictory if parents have low education. Parents with low education tend to encourage their children to marry early, especially girls, so that the responsibility shifts to the husband. In addition, financial factors are a source of causing parents' decisions with children who only graduate from elementary, junior high, or high school to be encouraged to continue marriage because they are considered a burden on life [48]. Conversely, parents with high education tend to reject early marriage because they believe in the negative impact that will occur on children; instead, a child will be facilitated to continue their education and career to the highest level [49], [50].

The role of parents is important in deciding to marry. Psychologically, adolescents do not yet understand and are fully prepared for marriage; the early age of adolescence can be categorized as a phase that is still emotionally unstable, with ups and downs that can trigger psychological trauma in life [51]. The effects of early marriage can cause individuals to lose their freedom of expression, feel embarrassed to socialize and experience limited socialization [33]. On the other hand, the perpetrators of early marriage are not ready to take on the role of husband and wife, let alone have to change roles as fathers and mothers. This can cause anxiety about life after marriage, which can trigger stress and depression and even lead to feelings of regret because they cannot continue their education like other teenagers [52].

Women more clearly feel the impact of early marriage than men. According to Sari et al., (2023), early marriage, especially in women, will cause various problems, both psychologically, which has the impact of making individuals miscarry during pregnancy or socio-economic problems⁶. Economically, the woman (wife) will depend financially on her husband because of the basic obligation of a husband to provide for his wife. However, this sometimes even becomes a benchmark for households to be less harmonious because the husband feels himself as a powerful controller in the household with a patriarchal cultural line of thought, which is a culture that is oriented towards giving a more dominant position and power to men. In contrast, women become weak (Astuti et al., 2006). This patriarchal culture shows an inequality in access to economic and non-economic resources. Research conducted by Sulastri dan Retnowati (2003) on an exploratory study of a woman's economic independence is one of the factors triggering husband violence against his wife.

Individuals who perform early marriage are in adolescence; according to Syalis dan Nurwati (2020), adolescence is a transitional phase with emotional turmoil, a search for self-identity, and unstable individual mental conditions. At this time, it will certainly lead to husband-wife conflicts that lead to divorce [57]. If in the household there continues to be conflict and imbalance when building a harmonious family, it can cause stress, anxiety, depression, decreased quality of life, and psychological well-being, especially in women who feel the effects of household discomfort more.

Psychological well-being is a condition in which individuals feel satisfied and balanced in various aspects of their psychological life; it is not just about feeling happy but involves achieving and maintaining optimal states in various aspects, which include self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, autonomy, mastery of the environment, life goals and personal growth (Ryff, 1989). Suppose a woman succeeds in marrying at a young age. In that case, she will overcome her problems and achieve a state of psychological well-being with forms of feeling free from anxiety, achieving a sense of peace and happiness in her heart, and feeling that someone is protecting her.

When individuals perform early marriage, they are still in adolescence, Hurlock (1997) explains that this age is the stage for individuals to find their true identity. This situation

⁶ Sari, L, E Karliani, and D Dotrimensi. "Pernikahan Dini Dan Implikasinya Pada Angka Putus Sekolah Di Desa Tumbang Habaon Kecamatan Tewah Kabupaten Gunung Mas." *Journal Pendidikan Ilmu ...*, no. 15 (2023): 428–33.

certainly makes an adolescent immature to undergo the consequences of achieving psychological well-being by the aspects proposed by Ryff (1989), it is conditions like this that cause the psychological well-being of married adolescents to be low because it is difficult to achieve if their developmental tasks have not been fulfilled even though adolescents are biologically mature and ready to reproduce.

It cannot be avoided, and when individuals decide to get married, many demands must be met, starting from the role of women as a family, as wives, as housewives, as a wife for children to become pressured, which can cause conflict and cause low psychological well-being [60]. Many studies show that women have low psychological well-being compared to men [61]. Even Papalia et al., (2004) mentioned that women's psychological well-being tends to decline after marriage. This is because marriage limits a woman's space, and her time is consumed by her husband and children, making it difficult for her to develop herself [63].

Based on the results of several review articles, early marriage is a phenomenon that mostly occurs in developing countries. The many factors that underlie early marriage are more likely to be avoided if families, especially educated parents, understand the importance of delaying marriage until children reach adulthood to complete their education and develop the skills needed for an independent and prosperous future. In addition to the role of parents, husbands who understand their role in marriage are also very important for their wives' psychological well-being; a loving, understanding attitude without feeling the most powerful will create a harmonious environment and achieve the positive side of marriage.

Although previous research has focused more on the negative impact of early marriage on women, not all men who marry at a young age have high psychological well-being; there are certainly other factors that have not been studied in more depth from a male perspective. Some men also experience pressure and stress from having to take on big responsibilities at a very young age. Therefore, further studies are needed to understand how early marriage affects the psychological well-being of men from different countries and whether they also experience the same negative impacts as women. Thus, addressing the problem of early marriage requires a holistic approach that includes good education for parents and husbands as well as comprehensive research on the impact of early marriage on both women and men.

5 Conclusion

Early marriage is a complex phenomenon influenced by a variety of factors, both internal and external. Internal factors such as low levels of education and strong religious influences often determine marriage at a young age. On the other hand, external factors such as culture, economic conditions, social dynamics, social support, and rural environment also play a crucial role in early marriage. Women more often feel the effects of early marriage; in addition, the existence of unequal power dynamics in the marriage relationship can increase domestic violence. As a result, women's psychological well-being declines.

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