

Research Article

**REPRODUCING HONOR: CHILD MARRIAGE WITHIN
SYMBOLIC AND COMMUNAL POWER RELATIONS IN EAST
KALIMANTAN**

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ABSTRACT

Child marriage remains a persistent social practice within Indonesian society, including in East Kalimantan, a region marked by strong extractive economic structures, pronounced spatial inequalities, and rapid social transformations as a buffer zone for the new national capital (IKN). This article examines child marriage practices across 13 districts and municipalities in East Kalimantan through Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social practice, emphasizing the interplay between habitus, symbolic capital, and social fields in shaping social action. The study employs a descriptive-qualitative method, based on in-depth interviews with 89 individuals engaged in Child marriage. Findings reveal that Child marriage is legitimized by communal moral pressures, customary norms, and the logic of family honor, further reinforced by the state through marriage dispensation practices in religious courts. The agency of adolescent girls in decision-making is severely constrained by patriarchal social structures, structural poverty, and limited access to education and reproductive health services. Within a social space characterized by unequal distribution of cultural and symbolic capital, Child marriage emerges as a strategy of honor reproduction deemed socially legitimate. The article argues that child marriage is not merely an individual problem but a product of symbolic power relations and local social structures. Reform of marriage dispensation regulations, community-based sexuality education, and value interventions through grassroots institutions are urgently needed to disrupt the cycle of intergenerational inequality.

Keywords: child marriage; habitus; social reproduction; honor

ABSTRAK

Pernikahan usia dini merupakan praktik sosial yang terus berlangsung dalam masyarakat Indonesia, termasuk di Kalimantan Timur, sebuah wilayah dengan karakteristik ekstraktif kuat, ketimpangan sosial tinggi, dan transformasi sosial cepat sebagai penyangga Ibu Kota Negara (IKN). Artikel ini mengkaji praktik pernikahan anak di 13 Kabupaten/Kota di Kalimantan Timur dengan menggunakan pendekatan teori Prakti Sosial Pierre Bourdieu yang menekankan interaksi antara habitus, kapital simbolik, dan ranah sosial dalam pembentukan tindakan sosial. Penelitian ini dilakukan dengan metode deskriptif-kualitatif dengan melakukan wawancara mendalam terhadap 89 pelaku pernikahan dini. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa praktik pernikahan dini dilegitimasi oleh tekanan moral komunitas, norma adat, dan logika kehormatan keluarga yang diperkuat oleh pengadilan oleh negara melalui praktik dispensasi kawin oleh pengadilan agama. Agensi perempuan remaja dalam pengambilan keputusan sangat terbatas karena terkungkung oleh struktur sosial patriarkal, kemiskinan struktural, serta minimnya akses terhadap pendidikan dan layanan kesehatan reproduksi. Dalam ruang sosial yang ditandai oleh ketimpangan modal budaya dan simbolik, pernikahan dini menjadi strategi reproduksi kehormatan yang dianggap sah secara sosial. Artikel ini menegaskan bahwa pernikahan anak bukan hanya masalah individu, tetapi produk dari relasi kuasa simbolik dan struktur sosial lokal. Diperlukan reformasi regulasi dispensasi kawin, pendidikan seksualitas berbasis komunitas, dan intervensi nilai melalui institusi akar rumput untuk memutus siklus ketimpangan antargenerasi.

Kata Kunci: pernikahan dini; habitus; reproduksi sosial; kehormatan.

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INTRODUCTION

Child marriage continues to constitute a serious social problem, particularly in developing countries, despite the enactment of various regulations, policies, and interventions (Barkah et al., 2023; Grijns & Horii, 2018; Huzaimah et al., 2024; Wahhaj, 2018). This condition poses a significant challenge to the realization of children's rights, gender equality, and the sustainable development of human capital (Chao, 2022; Dessalegn et al., 2020; Genowska et al., 2022; Hussain & Mazumdar, 2025). A number of studies highlight the determinants of child marriage, ranging from economic deprivation and limited educational attainment to cultural and religious constructions that situate women in subordinate positions (Bezie & Addisu, 2019; Duran & Tepehan Eraslan, 2019; Kidman et al., 2024; Musafaah et al., 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated this condition, resulting in increased adolescent pregnancies and educational disparities (Antarsih et al., 2023). Research in West Africa demonstrates that war and conflict can accelerate the practice, as families marry off young girls either as a protection strategy or as a consequence of socio-economic disruption (DiGiuseppe & Haer, 2022).

Law No. 16 of 2019 set the minimum legal age of marriage at 19 for both women and men. However, the persistence of marriage dispensation remains a legal loophole legitimizing child marriage (Rahmawati & Nuraeni, 2021; Rachmatulloh & Syafiuddin, 2022; Yuliana, 2020). Statistics from the Indonesian Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS, 2023) reveal that Indonesia ranks among the top ten countries with the highest prevalence of child marriage globally, with at least one in nine women marrying before the age of 18 (Budianto, 2024; UNICEF, 2023). Child marriage cannot be understood merely as a consequence of poverty or tradition, but rather as the product of complex interactions between structural conditions, cultural norms, and individual choices (DiGiuseppe & Haer, 2022; Horii, 2020). In local contexts, children are often deemed “ready” for marriage for reasons of morality, family honor, or due to inadequate access to education (Arif, 2018). Such perspectives illustrate how Child marriage functions as a form of social control legitimized by communal values.

In many regions, customary norms, religious interpretations, and socio-economic conditions remain central drivers (Lowe et al., 2022; Sopyan et al., 2023; Setiawan et al., 2024). A new phenomenon has even emerged in which segments of urban Muslim youth actively promote Child marriage via social media as an expression of piety (Nisa, 2020). Contemporary studies highlight new dynamics that challenge international protectionist frameworks on child marriage. Research in Bali, for instance, reveals that some adolescent girls make the decision to marry independently, though such choices cannot be detached from social pressures and structural constraints (Horii, 2020). This underscores the importance of acknowledging the ambivalence between children’s agency and their entrapment within patriarchal structures.

In East Kalimantan, the complexity of this issue is particularly evident. Data from the Regional Office for Women’s Empowerment, Child Protection, and Family Planning (DP3AKB) indicate an increasing trend in applications for marriage dispensation in the past five years across districts and municipalities such as Samarinda, Kutai Kartanegara, and Paser (Damayanti, 2024; Kaltim Today, 2023). Although the province is known for its relatively high Human Development Index (HDI) and is undergoing massive transformation through the construction of the new national capital (IKN), marriage dispensation cases and child marriage practices remain widespread (DP3AKB, 2024; Damayanti, 2024; Sutrisno et al., 2020; Almerio, 2021). Contributing factors include structural poverty, limited access to quality education, low levels of reproductive health literacy, and the dominance of patriarchal values (Rizkianti & Sari, 2025; Behere et al., 2020; Arif, 2018; Pratiwi, 2022; Sari & Putri, 2021). In many cases, Child marriage is not merely a response to crisis but rather a socially accepted strategy, despite its consequences of school dropout, economic dependency, and heightened vulnerability to domestic violence.

Theoretically, Child marriage cannot be understood as a linear outcome of structural, religious, or psychological factors, but rather as part of a complex process of social reproduction. Pierre Bourdieu’s (1990) theory of practice, with its concepts of habitus, capital, and field, offers a critical lens to examine how historical dispositions, limited economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital, as well as interactions within social fields, shape Child marriage as a rationalized and socially legitimate strategy (Emirbayer & Johnson, 2008; Swartz, 1997). The habitus of communities, particularly in rural and customary settings in East Kalimantan, continues to perpetuate this practice despite modernization and formal regulations.

The urgency of this research lies in the need for a sociological-critical approach that goes beyond prohibition, by unpacking how the practice is reproduced through relations of power, norms, and social structures. Without deeper analysis, policy interventions risk remaining superficial. This study aims to provide a novel contribution by analyzing Child marriage in East Kalimantan through Bourdieu's perspective, highlighting how habitus, capital, and social fields shape and sustain the practice. Accordingly, the findings are expected to contribute both to academic debates and to the formulation of policies that are more contextual, gender-sensitive, and child-centered.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study was conducted across 13 districts and municipalities in East Kalimantan Province and parts of North Kalimantan, encompassing urban areas such as Samarinda and Balikpapan, as well as rural regions such as East Kutai, Mahakam Ulu, and Paser. The research sites were purposively selected based on the prevalence of child marriage cases, cultural diversity, and socio-economic accessibility. The study was designed as part of a project-based learning initiative within the *Social Problems* course, in which 89 university students acted as field researchers, conducting direct observations and interviews with individuals engaged in Child marriage within their respective communities. This strategy allowed for an integration of academic learning with empirical experience, while simultaneously broadening the scope of exploration into contextualized social practices (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data collection techniques included observations of the social environment, semi-structured interviews with underage married couples, and document analysis such as marriage dispensation records, village profiles, and administrative reports. The interview protocols were designed to elicit participants' motives, experiences, and perceptions in an open manner, employing a non-judgmental and ethical approach, particularly given that the majority of informants were socially vulnerable young women. Within this framework, the research positioned informants not as objects of study, but as subjects who carry perspectives on the very practices they embody (Flick, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Data analysis was conducted using a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2019), enabling the identification of central themes such as the logic of family honor, the influence of custom and religion, and the unequal distribution of cultural capital. The entire analytical process was situated within the distinctive socio-cultural context of East Kalimantan, where community pressures, informal social control, and patriarchal structures remain dominant. Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social practice served as the primary analytical framework, mapping the relations between family habitus, the symbolic capital of honor, and the social fields in which the legitimacy of Child marriage is reproduced (Bourdieu, 1990; Swartz, 1997). Reflexivity and triangulation across data sources were applied to ensure analytical rigor and validity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice emphasizes that social action never stands in isolation; rather, it emerges through the interaction of habitus, field, and capital. Habitus is understood as a system of dispositions formed through lived experience, which internalizes norms, values, and social structures within the individual (Bourdieu, 1977). Habitus operates within a field, defined as a social arena in which actors compete and interact according to specific rules of the game. Within the field, actors mobilize various

forms of capital (economic, cultural, social, and symbolic) to secure position and legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1986). Capitals do not function independently but are mutually convertible; for instance, cultural capital (education) can be transformed into economic capital (a high-paying occupation), while symbolic capital (honor) can reinforce social authority.

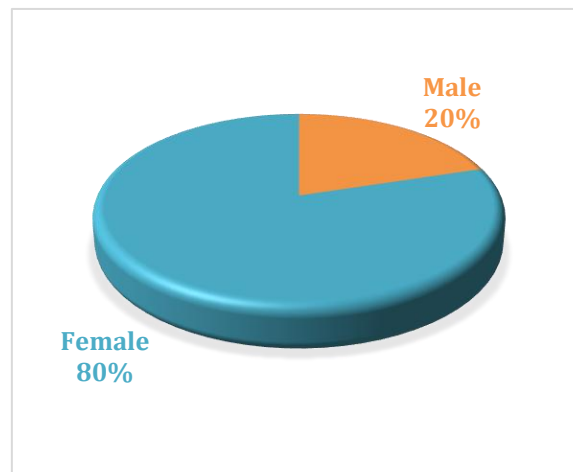
Through the combination of habitus, field, and capital, social practices take shape and tend to reproduce existing social structures, thereby perpetuating inequality across generations (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Yet Bourdieu does not deny the possibility of agency: individuals may develop strategies to navigate the field, though always within the constraints of existing structures (Swartz, 1997). In moments of social transformation, agents can shift the rules of the field by deploying capitals creatively, thereby opening the potential for change.

The phenomenon of Child marriage in East Kalimantan cannot be reduced to a deviation from formal legal norms or to individual decision-making; rather, it constitutes a manifestation of complex social structures. It is not merely the expression of habitus legitimized by customary and religious norms but is also deeply entangled with dimensions of mental health, gender, and global socio-economic dynamics. Kalam et al. (2025) argue that the drivers of child marriage are multilayered, ranging from individual agency and family circumstances to community norms and state regulatory weaknesses. Jones et al. (2020), in the Ethiopian context, demonstrate that the agency of adolescent girls remains limited yet persists within a complex negotiation involving parents, community leaders, and the state.

In East Kalimantan, the logic of family honor, unequal access to education, and the lax regulation of marriage dispensations form a multi-level constellation of factors that sustain the reproduction of Child marriage practices. Field data indicate that 71 respondents (80%) were female and 18 (20%) were male. The majority (48.3%) married at the age of 18, followed by 18% at 19, another 18% at 17, 13.5% at 16, and a small number at 13. This demonstrates that Child marriage in the region primarily targets adolescents at their most vulnerable stage, educationally, economically, and emotionally.

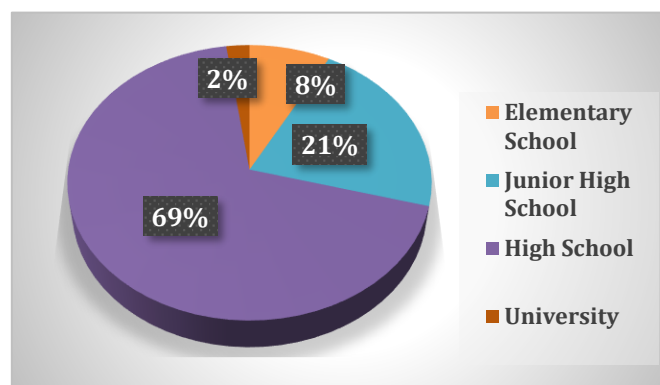
From the perspective of occupation and income, 54% of respondents were unemployed, while 41% reported employment, 21% in the formal sector and 20% in the informal sector, with the remaining 5% still in higher education. Income levels reveal stark economic vulnerability: 35% earned less than one million rupiah per month, 23% between one to three million, 14% between three to seven million, and only 2% above seven million. These findings suggest that child marriage is concentrated among groups with limited economic capital, positioning marriage as both a survival strategy and a socially sanctioned exit from communal pressures.

Figure 1
Gender Informants



Source: structured interview, 2024

Figure 2
Education of Informants



Source: structured interview, 2024

Regarding motivations, the majority (64.1%) cited unplanned pregnancy as the primary driver of marriage, while 22.5% pointed to family and community pressure, and only 13.4% claimed it was a self-initiated decision. More than 70% reported that the decision was made under pressure from parents, religious figures, or village officials. Several respondents disclosed that neighborhood leaders (*RT*) and religious authorities actively facilitated Child marriage as a solution to cover up “family disgrace.” These accounts underscore the severely constrained individual agency, particularly that of girls in determining their life trajectories.

Through the lens of Pierre Bourdieu’s (1990) social practice framework, this phenomenon can be situated within broader processes of social reproduction that reinforce inequalities in cultural, economic, and symbolic capital. Girls are not autonomous agents but subjects shaped by moral pressures, familial control, customary legitimations, and religious discourses that place family honor above children’s rights (Sari & Putri, 2021). The state, which ought to function as a guarantor of children’s rights, often becomes entangled in the ambivalence between formal regulations and local power relations, thereby indirectly reinforcing the status quo (Giddens, 1984; Swartz, 1997).

Social Legitimacy and the Habitus of Child Marriage

Habitus is a system of dispositions shaped by social experience and serving as the foundation of actions that appear natural (Bourdieu, 1990). In the context of Child marriage, the habitus of families and communities produces schemes of perception and action that normalize the practice as a form of honor and social responsibility. When these values are reiterated and legitimized within the social space, they acquire symbolic legitimacy (Swartz, 1997; Emirbayer & Johnson, 2008; Barkah et al., 2023), closing the space for young women's agency while reinforcing structural inequalities.

The practice of Child marriage in East Kalimantan is a social practice that gains strong legitimacy through the community habitus. Habitus, in Bourdieu's (1990) sense, constitutes a system of dispositions shaped by collective historical experiences and social structures institutionalized in everyday practices. Within this framework, customary norms, conservative religious interpretations, and narratives of family honor construct a symbolic landscape that renders child marriage as a "logical," "honorable," and inevitable option.

The majority of respondents who married due to unplanned pregnancies (64.1%) reveal the dominance of structural factors over individual agency. Such decisions are perceived as restoring family dignity and strengthening social status, wherein the symbolic capital of honor outweighs cultural capital (education) and economic capital. Consequently, the collective habitus of local communities sustains a social logic that subordinates girls' rights to communal interests. Symbolic legitimacy of Child marriage thus derives from a habitus that internalizes conservative values, reinforcing female subordination and foreclosing their room for agency.

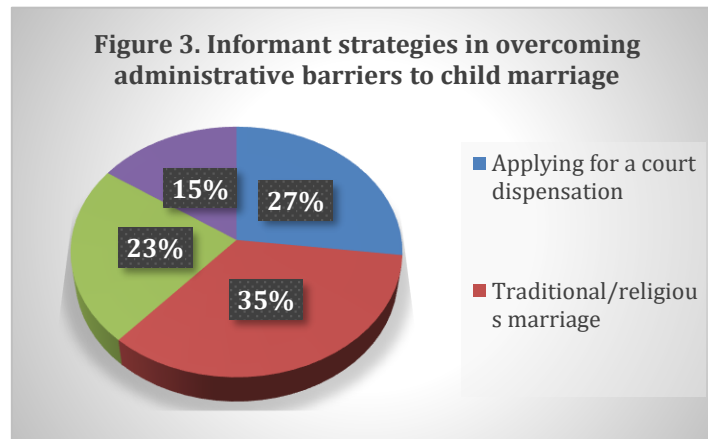
Table 1
Taxonomy of Social Pressures and Social Capital

| Social Aspect | Empirical Categories | Symbolic/Sociological Function |
|----------------------|---|--|
| Family Control | Parental pressure to marry if pregnant | Reproduction of honor and moral regulation |
| Community Pressure | Demands from religious leaders, RT, neighbors | Collective norms as instruments of control |
| State Sphere | Marriage dispensation as social legitimacy | Institutionalization of local norms |
| Symbolic Capital | Marriage perceived as restoring shame | Symbolic honor outweighs educational value |

Source: In-depth interviews, 2024

In the broader context of Eastern cultural values, Child marriage represents a longstanding habitus for coping with social anxieties and threats. In cases of pregnancy outside marriage, swift matrimony is considered the sole route to safeguard family and communal honor. Marriage is framed as restoring familial dignity. Meanwhile, among impoverished households, marrying into wealthier families is viewed as a shortcut to escape the cycle of poverty. Formal legal structures ostensibly designed to protect children's rights prove toothless under the dominance of entrenched cultural values. The rising number of marriage dispensations across districts and cities in East Kalimantan over time indicates the persistence of such cultural dominance.

Figure 3
Informant strategies in overcoming administrative barriers to child marriage



Source: structured interview, 2024

Formal legal prohibitions on child marriage are circumvented in multiple ways. Families with sufficient legal knowledge and bureaucratic connections apply directly for dispensations from the local Office of Religious Affairs (KUA). A total of 28 informants reported applying for such dispensations themselves, while 24% relied on extended family or external connections to navigate the process. For 36% of informants, traditional or religious ceremonies were pursued as an alternative when facing administrative barriers, often entailing prolonged struggles to secure formal dispensation.

The family and community habitus thus produces schemes of perception and action that normalize Child marriage as both an honorable and socially responsible act (Bourdieu, 1990). When such values are reproduced and legitimized within the social sphere, they acquire symbolic legitimacy (Swartz, 1997; Emirbayer & Johnson, 2008). Horii (2020) argues that children's decisions to marry are often perceived as expressions of agency, though in fact constrained within patriarchal structures that circumscribe their choices. Cuevas-Parra and Tisdall (2022) similarly demonstrate that although children occasionally attempt resistance through activism, familial and communal power structures remain dominant.

In Eastern Indonesia, symbolic capital in the form of family honor frequently overrides educational and economic considerations in decision-making. In the context of East Kalimantan, customary norms, conservative religious interpretations, and narratives of family honor collectively construct a symbolic landscape that renders child marriage a "logical" and "honorable" choice (Zulkarnain & Ramadhan, 2019). Kohno et al. (2021) emphasize the importance of measuring adolescents' attitudes toward Child marriage with valid instruments, given that young women's own perceptions are often marginalized in structural analyses. This opens a pathway for further research into the ambivalence between personal aspirations and entrapment within patriarchal structures. Marriage is still commonly framed as a solution to mitigate stigma or familial burdens, even though it may exacerbate health vulnerabilities (Kumar et al., 2019). This analogy resonates with findings from East Kalimantan, where families frequently promote Child marriage as a means of alleviating shame or social pressure, despite the potential for severe psychosocial consequences.

Social Reproduction and Capital Inequality

The concept of social reproduction introduced by Pierre Bourdieu is pivotal in understanding how inequality in society is not only produced through economic structures but also transmitted via dispositions of habitus, the distribution of capital, and symbolic domination within specific social arenas. Bourdieu (1990) asserts that social practices are not merely the result of rational individual choices but are constituted through the reproduction of values, norms, and opportunity structures that are inscribed within the habitus and reinforced through institutions such as family, school, and religion. In the context of child marriage, social reproduction operates through the internalization of values of honor, the regulation of female sexuality, and the symbolic construction of social status transmitted intergenerationally (Swartz, 1997).

Contemporary studies demonstrate that inequalities in cultural and symbolic capital play a central role in perpetuating child marriage practices, particularly in communities with conservative value systems and limited access to education (Bezie & Addisu, 2019; Barkah et al., 2023; Kidman et al., 2024). When the state fails to reform the value structures underpinning such practices, the reproduction of inequality does not only occur within the economic sphere but also within the symbolic and cultural realms, thereby reinforcing women's subordination within socially legitimized cycles (Emirbayer & Johnson, 2008). Thus, conceptualizing child marriage as a form of social reproduction allows us to unravel how power operates subtly in shaping the dispositions and life trajectories of young generations within unequal social spaces.

Table 2
Social Reproduction and Capital Inequality

| Source of Social Reproduction | Form of Capital Inequality | Impact on Marriage Decisions |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| Parents | Low education & Child marriage | Legitimization of Child marriage decisions |
| Family Economy | Structural poverty | Marriage as a survival strategy |
| School | Dropping out since junior high | Education no longer viewed as social mobility |
| Local Community | Conservative values on honor | Symbolic capital valued more than cultural or economic capital |

Source: in-depth interviews, 2024

In East Kalimantan, data indicate that the majority of young couples entering Child marriage come from families with low educational backgrounds, structural poverty, and intergenerational histories of Child marriage. Field data reveal that 73% of informants' mothers were also married during adolescence, while 27% married in adulthood. Meanwhile, 61% of fathers completed only primary or junior high school, 39% graduated from senior high school, and 85% of young couples dropped out since junior high school. These figures demonstrate how inequalities in cultural capital, particularly in the form of limited education, are systematically transmitted and reproduce child marriage practices across generations.

This situation reveals that parents' low education directly impacts their limited understanding of children's rights, the risks of child marriage, and the importance of continued education. As highlighted by Bezie and Addisu (2019) and Pratiwi (2022), families with low educational attainment are more vulnerable to framing marriage as a solution to economic and social pressures. In East Kalimantan, this condition is reinforced by structural poverty, where 35% of informants reported earning less than one million rupiah per month and the majority lacked stable employment.

The decision to marry off daughters is often understood as a strategy to safeguard family honor. Within customary communities, symbolic capital in the form of family reputation occupies a dominant position over cultural or economic capital. This reputation operates implicitly through social recognition, thereby rendering Child marriage socially acceptable and honorable. In this sense, the logic of symbolic capital (honor) subordinates the value of education and financial capacity within the social arenas of rural life (Bourdieu, 1986; Swartz, 1997).

Miedema et al. (2020) emphasize that the analysis of child marriage cannot be confined to its portrayal as a deviation from global human rights norms but must instead acknowledge its emic complexity: for some families, marrying off daughters is perceived as a safe path to confront economic and social risks. In local contexts, this is reflected in the strategies of working-class extractive families who perceive Child marriage as a symbolic reproduction of honor, as well as a form of protection against social stigma.

Formal education serves as a critical instrument to disrupt the cycle of child marriage in South Kalimantan (Arif, 2018), by strengthening young women's bargaining power in delaying marriage (Nurhadi & Hidayah, 2023). Yet schools, which should act as liberating institutions, fail to fulfill this function due to low levels of gender literacy and the absence of adequate child protection curricula. The vast majority of young couples (85%) entering Child marriage did not complete junior high school, resulting in education no longer being perceived as a pathway to social mobility. This demonstrates that social reproduction operates simultaneously through institutional failure and the internalization of conservative community values. Child marriage practices in East Kalimantan can thus be understood as processes of social reproduction that entrench intergenerational inequalities. Low educational attainment, structural poverty, and conservative honor norms collectively sustain the subordination of women within cycles that are socially legitimized.

Bargaining Power, Agency, and the Ambiguity of the State

In the context of East Kalimantan, the role of the state through formal regulation such as Law No. 16 of 2019 is profoundly ambiguous. The implementation of this regulation is often subordinated to compromises with local values and informal power relations. Field data indicate that more than 40% of Child marriage cases are facilitated through the mechanism of marriage dispensation, primarily due to pregnancy and family pressure. This dispensation process is usually accelerated by the intervention of community leaders, neighborhood heads (RT), religious authorities, and village heads, who actively promote social resolution through marriage. Such ambiguity renders formal law subordinate to compromises with traditional values. The role of the state is highly symbolic—present in legal texts, yet absent in concrete interventions to protect children's rights (Yuliana, 2020).

Within Giddens's (1984) framework of structuration, this condition illustrates how the state's legal structures are reactivated through the practices of local agents.

Consequently, marriage dispensation ceases to function as child protection and instead becomes a normative legitimization of long-standing practices rooted in moral and religious control. Narratives from informants reveal that marriage decisions are rarely made with the full consent of young women; rather, they are more frequently positioned as objects of family and community decision-making.

Table 3
Qualitative Taxonomy: Agency, Social Structure, and State Ambiguity

| Social Sphere | Actors/Institutions | Roles and Interventions | Social Implications |
|----------------------|---|--|--|
| Family | Parents, especially mother/father | Organize and decide children's marriages, particularly in cases of teenage pregnancy | Restricts girls' agency; reproduces honor values through control of the body |
| Local Community | RT, religious leaders, village head | Exert normative pressure; mediate marriage as a social solution | Collective legitimization of child marriage; symbolic pressure on the family |
| Religious Court | Judges, clerks, judicial bureaucracy | Grant dispensation based on customary values and local moralities | The state reinforces traditional norms rather than protecting children's rights |
| Adolescent Girls | Young female subjects | Considered as decision objects; seldom consulted | Minimal agency; reduced to symbols of family honor sacrificed to social expectations |
| State (regulatory) | Laws, policies, Ministry of Religious Affairs | Provides a formal legal framework, but weak in enforcement | Law becomes symbolic; ineffective in challenging conservative social structures |

Source: in-depth interviews, 2024

The agency of young women in this context is acutely constrained. Although they are formally positioned as actors in the marriage process, the decisions are effectively dictated by social structures and collective pressures. This resonates with Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) assertion that agency is a product of complex temporal structures, rather than merely individual capacity. In this case, child marriage functions as a mechanism of social control to regulate female sexuality and embodiment, with the state—ironically—reinforcing the subordination of women through lax dispensations that normalize Child marriage.

Social Consequences and Post-Marriage Narratives

The consequences of Child marriage are multidimensional. The majority of female informants did not continue their education after marriage; 85% dropped out as early as junior high school, while a small fraction among university students (5%) were unable to complete their studies. This condition results in the loss of opportunities for social

mobility and consolidates cycles of poverty. Economically, 54% of informants who were unemployed were fully dependent on their husbands or families, while 35% earned less than one million rupiah per month. Such structural dependency underscores the financial precarity that obstructs young women's autonomy. Packer et al. (2020) further emphasize that the aspirations of adolescent girls are often destroyed by Child marriage, as poverty, domestic burdens, and early pregnancies undermine educational and economic aspirations. This perspective reinforces the argument that Child marriage constitutes a form of structural deprivation that obstructs the realization of the younger generation's potential.

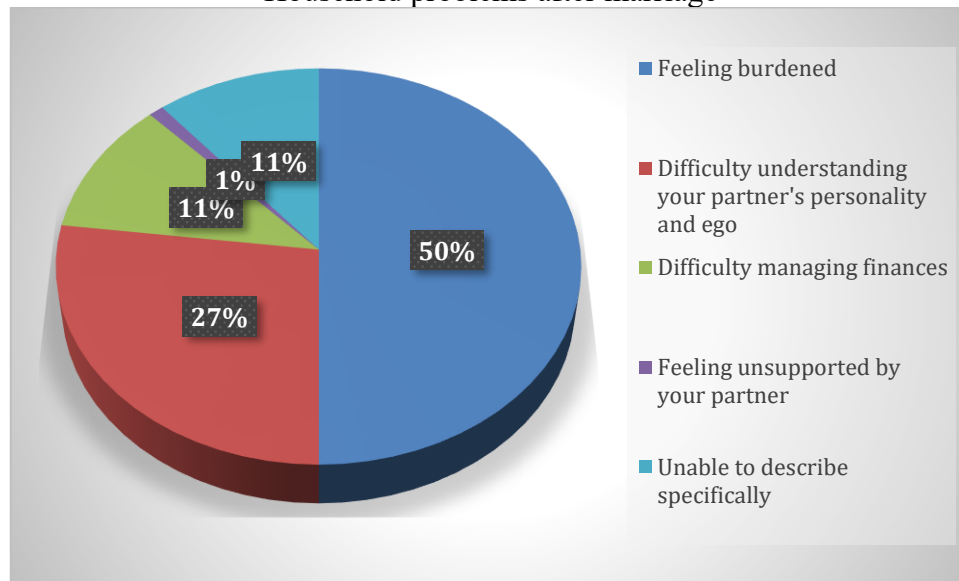
Table 4
Social dimensions, impacts and characteristics of vulnerability of child marriage

| Social Dimension | Form of Impact | Character of Vulnerability |
|-----------------------------|--|---|
| Education | Dropping out of school since junior/senior high | Loss of opportunities for social mobility and capacity building |
| Economy | Financial dependence on husband or parents | Limited access to decent work and economic independence |
| Emotional/ Psychological | Emotional unpreparedness, domestic stress, mild mental disorders | Lack of readiness to face adult roles and childrearing |
| Family | Early divorce, domestic conflict | Social stigma, vulnerable position within family structures |
| Childrearing | Unstable parenting, authoritarian or permissive | Reproduction of intergenerational inequality, weak child protection |
| Social- Community | Stigma of young divorcee, family burden | Social exclusion, barriers to reintegration, declining self-esteem |

Source: in-depth interviews, 2024

Behere et al. (2020) emphasize that marriage cannot be seen as a "solution" to individual problems, including mental health, as it in fact exacerbates psychosocial vulnerabilities. Emotionally and psychologically, marriage at an early age leaves young couples ill-prepared to cope with the complexities of domestic life. Informant narratives indicate that emotional unpreparedness, stress stemming from conflict, and financial pressures were the primary causes of marital breakdown. Several cases even culminated in divorce within the first two years of marriage. Young divorced women face a double stigma: they are labeled as failures in maintaining a household while simultaneously becoming a burden on their families when returning home with children.

Figure 4
Household problems after marriage



Source: structured interview, 2024

Domestic struggles reported by informants reveal the lack of preparedness in facing marital life. Half of them confessed to being heavily burdened by household issues they had never imagined beforehand. More than a third (27%) stated that difficulties in understanding their partner's temperament and ego triggered frequent quarrels, 11% admitted lacking sufficient support from their partners, another 11% could not provide specific reasons, and 1% highlighted difficulties in managing household finances.

Children born from Child marriages grow up in emotionally and economically unstable environments. Parenting styles tend to be authoritarian or permissive, as parents themselves are not yet psychosocially mature. This dynamic heightens the risk of reproducing intergenerational cycles of Child marriage. Thus, the practice of Child marriage not only reproduces gender inequality but also creates structural cycles of vulnerability that entrap future generations. Załuski and Makara-Studzińska (2024) highlight how the institution of marriage itself can become a source of psychosocial pressure leading to exhaustion and health problems, underscoring that marriage does not always provide social protection, especially when it occurs under coercive or premature conditions.

Overall, these findings illustrate that Child marriage in East Kalimantan is not an individual or incidental phenomenon but rather part of a mechanism of social reproduction operating through habitus, the symbolic capital of honor, community pressures, and the state's ambivalence. Child marriage in East Kalimantan can thus be read as a social practice that reproduces structural inequalities through the interplay of habitus, honor-based norms, and the logics of economic survival. It is not merely a "tradition" but an arena in which the limited agency of women is negotiated within asymmetrical power relations. Comparative analysis with international studies reinforces the urgency of multi-level interventions, including reforming the dispensational legal framework, implementing community-based sexuality education, and strengthening the critical capacities of adolescent girls to challenge patriarchal habitus that constrains their futures. Therefore, policy interventions cannot be confined to normative-legalistic

approaches but must target the transformation of values and social structures that perpetuate this practice.

CONCLUSIONS

This study critically reveals that the practice of child marriage in East Kalimantan is not the outcome of free individual choice, but rather the product of complex structural relations between local habitus, the symbolic capital of honor, community pressure, and the ambiguous role of the state. Employing Bourdieu's social practice theory, this article contributes novelty by mapping the interactive nexus between symbolic capital, social reproduction, and legal legitimacy in explaining why child marriage persists despite the existence of prohibitive regulations. The findings indicate that the practice has become institutionalized within local value systems, legitimized by community institutions, and even mediated by the state through the mechanism of marital dispensation.

Theoretically, this article contributes to the development of studies on adolescent sexuality in Indonesia, which have remained fragmented between moralistic and legalistic approaches. The study affirms that adolescent sexuality in marginal regions is not merely a matter of personal ethics but an arena of symbolic power contestation between patriarchal structures and the constrained agency of young women. Field narratives demonstrate that the decision to marry early is often not an autonomous act of agency, but rather a reflection of the dominance of social structures that position women's bodies as instruments for preserving family honor. Thus, adolescent sexuality must be understood as a political issue, deeply intertwined with the dynamics of social control, gender hierarchies, and unequal access to information.

For future researchers, this study opens space for further exploration of the relationship between local institutions (village, schools, religious courts) and the reproduction of conservative values in policy. It also raises the need to examine how resistance to child marriage emerges within society and how young women's groups build alternative forms of agency beyond hegemonic norms.

Practically, the findings point toward three main policy recommendations:

1. Reforming the marital dispensation system, including strict evaluation of the grounds for applications and the involvement of psychosocial counselors as well as child protection mechanisms in the process.
2. Integrating comprehensive sexuality education into secondary school curricula in the region, with a community-based approach that is culturally sensitive yet grounded in the principles of children's rights.
3. Empowering communities through value transformation rather than merely legal socialization. This requires community-based intervention strategies involving religious leaders, customary authorities, and local women to deconstruct the honor-based narratives that normalize child marriage.

Through a reflective approach grounded in the lived experiences of young women, this article offers both theoretical and practical contributions to the understanding and mitigation of child marriage as a structural problem requiring multi-sectoral and intergenerational intervention.

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