

## Early Marriage Phenomena in Pandemic Era at Luwu Utara, Indonesia

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### Abstract

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has affected every aspect of life. Not only the decline in the economic situation, but it has also had an impact on the emergence of social problems such as the high rate of early marriage. Early marriage has been a scientific concern for a long time. However, scientific studies have not been able to reduce the rate of increase in the number of children marrying early. The loss of the rights of children who should receive proper education, play and the right to protection are forced to be “bound” in a marriage. The purpose of this article is to add references to solving the problem of early marriage which has been long problematic on an international, national and regional scale. This article discusses the objective conditions of early marriage during a pandemic and criticizes the implementation of strategies for preventing and handling cases of the early child marriage. The data in this study were taken from the main data in the form of in-depth interviews with competent informants. Additional data was taken from existing data at the related office in North Luwu Regency along with the news from online sites, became a reference in this article. This study establish that the number of early marriages has rising due to the widespread use of social networks and changes in daily activity patterns. For future studies, it is recommended to consider the determinant factors in different locations and in a wider scope.

**Keywords:** Covid-19; early marriage; Luwu Utara; strategy

### Abstrak

Dampak pandemi Covid-19 mempengaruhi setiap sendi kehidupan. Tidak hanya terpuruknya situasi ekonomi, tetapi juga berdampak pada munculnya masalah-masalah sosial seperti tingginya angka pernikahan dini. Pernikahan dini sudah menjadi konsen keilmuan sejak lama. Namun kajian keilmuan belum mampu menekan laju peningkatan angka anak menikah dini. Hilangnya hak-hak anak yang seharusnya memperoleh pendidikan yang layak, bermain serta hak mendapatkan perlindungan terpaksa harus “terikat” dalam sebuah pernikahan. Tujuan artikel ini adalah untuk menambah referensi pemecahan masalah pernikahan dini yang sudah sejak lama menjadi problematika baik di skala internasional, nasional, maupun regional. Secara khusus, artikel ini membahas mengenai kondisi objektif pernikahan dini masa pandemi dan mengkritisi pelaksanaan strategi pencegahan maupun penanganan kasus pernikahan anak usia dini. Data dalam penelitian ini diambil dari data utama berupa wawancara mendalam dengan informan yang kompeten. Data tambahan diambil dari data yang telah ada pada Dinas terkait di Kabupaten Luwu Utara ditambah berita dari situs online dan menjadi acuan dalam artikel ini. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan

angka pernikahan dini mengalami peningkatan dalam kurun waktu pandemi akibat luasnya penggunaan jejaring sosial dan perubahan pola aktivitas sehari-hari. Untuk studi lanjutan, kajian disarankan untuk mempertimbangan faktor determinan di lokasi yang berbeda dan dalam jangkauan yang lebih luas.

**Kata kunci:** Covid-19; Luwu Utara; pernikahan dini; strategi

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## A. Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic is not only a health problem but also as a major cause of social problems in the increase of early marriage.<sup>1</sup> The issue of children's rights to play, to get an education, disappears as a result of getting married at an early age. Coupled with the demographic problem, the high rate of early marriage will significantly affect the population growth. In addition, the problem of domestic violence is an unavoidable problem due to early marriage. Early marriage at young age eliminates children's rights. Children should have the freedom to get protection. On a global scale, according to the latest report of the United Nations for Children (UNICEF) that millions of girls around the world are at risk of early marriage. This number exceeds the 100 million children UNICEF had previously predicted before the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>2</sup> This means that, not only in Indonesia, but the whole world is experiencing the phenomenon of an increase in the number of children who marry underage. The study of the impact of the Corona virus on children has become the focus of many scientists to become material for consideration in policy making for dealing with children's social problems.<sup>3</sup>

Previous studies tend to focus on three things. First, studies showing economic factors as a trigger for early marriage.<sup>4</sup> Second, preventive measures and reversing of the impact of child marriage. Revealing the factors causing the high rate of child marriage has been studied by experts from various fields.<sup>5</sup> Finally, it has been noted that preventive measures have been

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<sup>1</sup> Anandita Phillipose and Mona Aika, "Child Marriage in COVID-19 Contexts: Disruptions, Alternative Approaches and Building Programme Resilience," *Johannesburgh*, 2020, <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2020/12/04/ministry-543-child-marriages-including-applications-in-malaysia-from-jan-se/1928716>.; Novita Rina Antarsih et al., "EARLY-AGE MARRIAGE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN INDONESIA: 2020-2021 KATADATA ANALYSIS," *AKSELERASI: Jurnal Ilmiah Nasional* 5, no. 2 (August 24, 2023): 90–99, <https://doi.org/10.54783/jin.v5i2.719>; W Magdhalena and I Zamzani, "Early Marriage Issues During the COVID-19 Pandemic," in *Prosiding Pengembangan Masyarakat Mandiri Berkemajuan Muhammadiyah (Bamara-Mu)* (Banjarmasin: MBUnivPress, 2022), 239–43, <http://proceeding.mbunivpress.or.id/index.php/bamara/article/view/627%0Ahttp://proceeding.mbunivpress.or.id/index.php/bamara/article/download/627/466>.

<sup>2</sup> U.N.I.C.E.F., "COVID-19: Children at Heightened Risk of Abuse, Neglect, Exploitation and Violence amidst Intensifying Containment Measures," 2020, <https://doi.org/2020>.

<sup>3</sup> Shuaibu Saidu Musa et al., "Early Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy: The Unspoken Consequences of COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria," *Public Health in Practice* 2 (November 2021): 100152, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.puhip.2021.100152>; Tangina Afrin and Mohammad Zainuddin, "Spike in Child Marriage in Bangladesh during COVID-19: Determinants and Interventions," *Child Abuse and Neglect*, n.d., <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2020.104918>.; Momoe Makino, Abu S Shonchoy, and Zaki Wahhaj, "Early Effects of the COVID-19 Lockdown on Children in Rural Bangladesh," *Studies in Economics* 2102 (2021); Anju Malhotra and Shatha Elnakib, *Evolutin in the Evidence Base on Child Marriage 2000-2019* (New York, 2021), <https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/Child-marriage-evidence-report-2021.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Raaj Kishore Biswas, Jahidur Rahman Khan, and Enamul Kabir, "Trend of Child Marriage in Bangladesh: A Reflection on Significant Socioeconomic Factors," *Children and Youth Services Review* 104 (September 2019): 104382, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2019.06.017>; Ayako Kohno et al., "Investigation of the Key Factors That Influence the Girls to Enter into Child Marriage: A Meta-Synthesis of Qualitative Evidence," ed. Jonathan Jong, *PLOS ONE* 15, no. 7 (July 17, 2020): e0235959, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0235959>.

<sup>5</sup> Enakshi Ganguly Thukral, *Prevention of Child Marriage : Impact on Girls*, ed. Sumitra Mukerji Unicef.Org, vol. 1 (New Delhi: HAQ: Centre for Child Rights, 2016),

taken by educating parents in preventing early marriage.<sup>6</sup> The three trends in the study of early marriage, it seems that the study has not revealed how the relationship between child-age couples is due to the influence of technology. The use of technology, especially social media, is something to be reckoned with when looking at the relationship that exists in marriage partners. The bond in marriage due to the intensity of the use of social media makes the relationship of young couples become a relationship that is built from pseudo-relationship (virtual relationship).

This study responds to two main questions; (a) what the objective conditions of early marriage during the Covid-19 pandemic are, (b) how early marriage relationships are built in a virtual context, and (c) How is the effectiveness of preventive and curative action strategies carried out in minimizing the impact of early marriage. Those three questions above are the subject of discussion in the following sections. Through the description of the respond to these two questions, it is expected that it can provide an understanding of the phenomenon of child marriage during the Covid -19 pandemic.

Obtaining an overview of early marriage from year to year tends to increase and experienced the significant increase during the Covid -19 pandemic. This increase was triggered by changes in daily activity patterns and the intensity of using gadgets. Technological factors are very important in carrying out children's daily activities. There are two strategies used in handling cases of early marriage, which are preventive and curative actions. Implementation of socialization through seminars is considered capable of being an early-warning system in preventing high rates of early marriage. Curative action is carried out by assistance and advocacy for children who marry early by involving various parties. It is expected that implementing these two strategies will reduce the increase in the number of early marriages.

## **B. Literature Review**

### **B.1. Early-age Marriage**

The phenomenon of early marriage has attracted the attention of many experts to study it in more depth. Not infrequently, their studies eventually trigger the definition of early marriage itself. Early marriage is defined as marriage carried out by adolescents under 18 years of age<sup>7</sup> or under

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<https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.27564.46723>; Fransiska Novita Eleanora and Andang Sari, "Child Protection And Marriage Prevention," *Hukum dan Masyarakat Madani* 9, no. 1 (June 22, 2019): 92, <https://doi.org/10.26623/humani.v9i1.1446>; Dian Latifiani, "The Darkest Phase for Family: Child Marriage Prevention and Its Complexity in Indonesia," *Journal of Indonesian Legal Studies* 4, no. 2 (November 30, 2019): 241–58, <https://doi.org/10.15294/jils.v4i2.34708>.

<sup>6</sup> Megan Arthur et al., "Child Marriage Laws around the World: Minimum Marriage Age, Legal Exceptions, and Gender Disparities," *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy* 39, no. 1 (January 2, 2018): 51–74, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1554477X.2017.1375786>; Amrit Amirapu, Niaz M Asadullah, and Zaki Wahhaj, "Child Marriage Law , Gender Norms and Marriage Customs," *EDI Working Paper*, 2019; Nazir Ullah, Saidatul Nadia Binti Abd Aziz, and Rao Qasim Idrees, "Child Marriages: International Laws and Islamic Laws Perspective," *Journal of Educational and Social Research* 11, no. 3 (May 10, 2021): 60, <https://doi.org/10.36941/jesr-2021-0051>.

<sup>7</sup> Naresh Manandhar and Sunil Kumar Joshi, "Health Co-Morbidities and Early Marriage in Women of a Rural Area of Nepal: A Descriptive Cross-Sectional Study," *Journal of Nepal Medical Association* 58, no. 230 (October 15, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.31729/jnma.5205>; Minale Bezie and Dagne Addisu, "Determinants of Early Marriage among Married Women in Injibara Town, North West Ethiopia: Community-Based Cross-Sectional Study," *BMC Women's Health* 19, no. 1 (December 8, 2019): 134, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12905-019-0832-0>; Lauren Rumble et al., "An Empirical Exploration of Female Child Marriage Determinants in Indonesia," *BMC Public Health* 18, no. 1 (December 27, 2018): 407, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-018-5313-0>.

20 years<sup>8</sup> who are not ready to get married.<sup>9</sup> Early marriage that is perceived by the community as something normal is the driving force for legal legitimacy for the marriage.<sup>10</sup> They think that early marriage is an effort to improve the economy as well as prevent children from the dangers of abuse and rape.<sup>11</sup> Not only society in general, parents also trigger children's decisions to marry early. For example, early marriages occurred in Sumenep Madura, where mothers with a history of early marriage tended to continue the tradition of marrying young in the next generation.<sup>12</sup> Thus, it can be seen that early marriage is not only a matter of the relationship between two human beings—a man and a woman—but is also surrounded by the assumptions and social-cultural encouragement of the surrounding community.

Early marriage is still rife even though it is often correlated with unpreparedness. The practice can carry risks to women's reproductive health such as lack of contraception, unwanted pregnancies, miscarriages, bleeding, infections, fever/seizures, low birth weight, and premature births.<sup>13</sup> Couples who marry early are also more at risk of divorce.<sup>14</sup> Some of these reasons that ultimately make Duman et al.<sup>15</sup> mentions early marriage as a form of child abuse. In addition to concerns about the decrease in the quality of life of women involved in early marriage relationships, children resulting from early marriages are also vulnerable to being 'far away' from adequate health services, especially in obtaining immunizations and breastfeeding.<sup>16</sup> This is because women who marry at a young age tend to have a low level of education and the minimum information about parenting.<sup>17</sup> In the end, this inadequate investment in children is a challenge for human development.<sup>18</sup>

## **B.2. Social Interaction Intensity**

The coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) has a major impact on many dimensions of human life, including health, employment, education, recreational activities, and economic action.<sup>19</sup> Changes in social interactions are a very clear and widespread effect of the Covid-19 pandemic. Research reveals that although social distancing reduces the spread of the spread of Covid-19, it

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<sup>8</sup> Nurma Fuji Astutik and Ira Nurmala, "Relationship of Individual Factors, and Social Factors with Mother's Intention to Continue Early Marriage Tradition in Indonesia," *Indian Journal of Forensic Medicine & Toxicology* 14, no. 3 (July 24, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.37506/ijfmt.v14i3.10521>.

<sup>9</sup> Syarifah Salmah, "Pernikahan Dini Ditinjau Dari Sudut Pandang Sosial Dan Pendidikan," *Al-Hiwar : Jurnal Ilmu dan Teknik Dakwah* 4, no. 6 (April 21, 2017): 10, <https://doi.org/10.18592/al-hiwar.v4i6.1215>.

<sup>10</sup> Nagihan Saday Duman, Emel Sari Gökten, and Hasan Nadir Rana, "Awareness and Attitudes of Physicians Towards Early-Age Marriage," *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry* 20, no. 3 (2017): 203–8, <https://doi.org/10.5505/kpd.2017.84803>.

<sup>11</sup> Fitriana Tsany, "Trend Pernikahan Dini di Kalangan Remaja (Studi Kasus Di Kabupaten Gunung Kidul Yogyakarta Tahun 2009-2012)," *Jurnal Sosiologi Agama* 9, no. 1 (March 17, 2017): 83, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jsa.2015.091-05>.

<sup>12</sup> Astutik and Nurmala, "Relationship of Individual Factors, and Social Factors with Mother's Intention to Continue Early Marriage Tradition in Indonesia."

<sup>13</sup> Rosmala Nur et al., "Early-Age Marriage and the Impact of Health Reproduction Women," *Journal of Engineering and Applied Sciences*, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.3923/jeasci.2019.981.986>.

<sup>14</sup> Adugnaw Zeleke Alem et al., "Spatial Distribution and Determinants of Early Marriage among Married Women in Ethiopia: A Spatial and Multilevel Analysis," *BMC Women's Health* 20, no. 1 (December 15, 2020): 207, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12905-020-01070-x>.

<sup>15</sup> Saday Duman, Sari Gökten, and Rana, "Awareness and Attitudes of Physicians Towards Early-Age Marriage."

<sup>16</sup> Trivanie Erlim Putri and Dwini Handayani, "Child Health Investment on Early Age Marriage Mother in Rural Indonesia," in *Proceedings of the 33rd International Business Information Management Association Conference, IBIMA 2019: Education Excellence and Innovation Management through Vision 2020*, 2019.

<sup>17</sup> Putri and Handayani.

<sup>18</sup> Putri and Handayani.

<sup>19</sup> Wei-Po Chou et al., "Voluntary Reduction of Social Interaction during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Taiwan: Related Factors and Association with Perceived Social Support," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 17, no. 21 (October 31, 2020): 8039, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17218039>.

can increase the likelihood of social isolation increasing the risk of morbidity, death, domestic and marital violence.<sup>20</sup> The lack of social interaction during Covid -19 also has an effect on decreasing mental health welfare because people cannot get social support directly from their social environment.<sup>21</sup>

The social restrictions that have been implemented by the government have resulted in a decrease in the intensity of in-person social interaction, so that social interaction during Covid -19 is only carried out online. That's in line with what was Adami et al<sup>22</sup> said that the impact of Covid 19 has changed the dynamics and dimensions of social interaction from open interaction in public spaces to centered on online social interaction. The minimum process of social interaction on the other hand also has a negative impact. In several studies related to Covid -19 and social interaction, it is stated that the lack of social interaction can result in: (1) mental health is disturbed<sup>23</sup>; (2) loss of social support and social motivation<sup>24</sup>; (3) increase in domestic violence<sup>25</sup>; (4) increasing cases of divorce<sup>26</sup>; and (6) increasing cases of marriage<sup>27</sup>. Talking about marriage, the lack of social interaction with peers due to a lockdown at school, some students are forced to marry early due to economic demands. In addition, the lack of social interaction and face-to-face school restrictions result in high rates of early marriage. The Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Children Protection (KPPA) reported an increase in the number of early marriages during COVID-19. Some of the factors that encourage child marriage are restrictions on children's activities and weaknesses in parental supervision which lead to promiscuity and teenage pregnancy.<sup>28</sup>

Besides, Brooks et al. identified 24 studies on the psychological impact of quarantine related to the pandemic. The psychological level includes fear, nervousness, stress, depression and irritability. They concluded that quarantine has negative psychological effects that can be severe and lead to death. Apart from the psychological side, COVID-19 also has an impact on the education system. Ali said that the government temporarily closed educational institutions including, schools, universities and public or private institutions to prevent the spread of the virus. Although considered a wise decision, it has had a detrimental effect on the educational activities of students around the world. Accordingly, Dhwan stated that policies that were decided unilaterally caused the education system to weaken and experience a decrease in the quality of students, because students were forced to understand the education system that had suddenly changed. Then, the impact of closing schools has also led to an increase in early marriages and cases of pregnancies outside of marriage. In the Global Girlhood 2020 report, there has been an increase of

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<sup>20</sup> Hyunji Kim and Arnd Florack, "When Social Interaction Backfires: Frequent Social Interaction During the COVID-19 Pandemic Is Associated With Decreased Well-Being and Higher Panic Buying," *Frontiers in Psychology* 12, no. May 2020 (July 29, 2021): 1–11, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.668272>.

<sup>21</sup> Chamara Sandeepa et al., "Social Interaction Tracking and Patient Prediction System for Potential COVID-19 Patients," in *2020 IEEE 3rd 5G World Forum (5GWF)* (IEEE, 2020), 13–18, <https://doi.org/10.1109/5GWF49715.2020.9221268>.

<sup>22</sup> Elisabetta Adami et al., "PanMeMic Manifesto: Making Meaning in the Covid-19 Pandemic and the Future of Social Interaction," *Working Papers in Urban Language & Literacies Paper* 273 (2020): 1–22.

<sup>23</sup> James Dimmock et al., "Relationships between Social Interactions, Basic Psychological Needs, and Wellbeing during the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Psychology & Health* 37, no. 4 (April 3, 2022): 457–69, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08870446.2021.1921178>.

<sup>24</sup> Hayder Ameer Jabor and Muhannad Abdullah Alshaer, "Social Interaction Anxiety in Responding to Covid-19 Outbreak in Arabic Region," *HIV Nursing* 21, no. 1 (2021): 10–13.

<sup>25</sup> Andrew M. Campbell, "An Increasing Risk of Family Violence during the Covid-19 Pandemic: Strengthening Community Collaborations to Save Lives," *Forensic Science International: Reports* 2, no. April (December 2020): 100089, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fsir.2020.100089>.

<sup>26</sup> Wendy D. Manning and Krista K. Payne, "Marriage and Divorce Decline during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Case Study of Five States," *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World* 7 (January 5, 2021): 237802312110069, <https://doi.org/10.1177/23780231211006976>.

<sup>27</sup> Manning and Payne.

<sup>28</sup> Elga Andina, "The Increasing Number of Child Marriages during the Covid-19 Pandemic," *Bidang Kesejahteraan Sosial* 13, no. 4 (2021): 13–18.

approximately 500000 more girls forced into early marriage and 1 million more pregnant girls.<sup>29</sup> This increase occurred due to economic shortages due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### C. Method

This research was conducted in North Luwu Regency with the consideration that this area has the highest number of child marriage cases in South Sulawesi.<sup>30</sup> This research uses qualitative research methods with a case study approach focusing on child marriage cases during the Covid-19 pandemic in North Luwu Regency.

This study used primary and secondary data. Primary data consists of data collected from observations and interviews at the research site. The secondary data used as the basis for this study came from statistical data from North Luwu P2PA Office and data from the Office of Religious Affairs in North Luwu District. Sources of information in this study were employees of government offices in North Luwu District, parents of children who married early, and children who married early. Sources of information were also taken from articles in various journals and online media. Data collection process: This research began by grouping issues related to child marriage and then collecting data related to statistics on cases of early marriage.

The data collected will then be analyzed using the Cultivation Theory to identify cases of child marriage that have increased in North Luwu Regency during the covid-19 pandemic. The data that has been collected is then selected and reduced, where the selected data is related to social media use and child marriage during the covid-19 pandemic. The interpreted data is then presented in the form of tables and interview quotes.

### D. Results

#### *D1. Objective condition of early marriage*

The phenomenon of increasing early marriage occurs in North Luwu, based on the records of the P2PA Office of North Luwu Regency, there were 74 cases of early marriage recorded in 2019 (before the pandemic), which increased to 170 cases in 2020 and rose again to 171 cases in mid-2021.

Table 1: Early Marriage Data for 2018 to 2021 Quarter III

GENDER	YEAR				AMOUNT
	2018	2019	2020	2021	
Woman	75	65	159	161	<b>460</b>
Man	14	9	11	10	<b>44</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>170</b>	<b>171</b>	<b>504</b>

*Data source: P2PA Masamba, 2021*

Table 1 shows that there has been an increase in early marriages in recent years. Interestingly, there was a surge in early marriage cases, which reached over 144,6% in 2020, with a total of 159 cases. Furthermore, the number increased significantly in the third quarter of 2021, surpassing the total number of early marriage cases in 2020. These data indicate that COVID-19 has not only affected the economy but also influenced society's tendency to marry early. The community belief that marriage can solve problems, including those related to COVID-19, has become common, especially in rural areas such as North Luwu. Marriage, including early marriage, is perceived as a solution to cope with COVID-19.

Marriage unite not only the two people who are married, but marriage actually unites two large family groups who know each other and even close family who don't know each other

<sup>29</sup> Yann Le Strat, Caroline Dubertret, and Bernard Le Foll, "Child Marriage in the United States and Its Association With Mental Health in Women," *Pediatrics* 128, no. 3 (September 1, 2011): 524–30, <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2011-0961>.

<sup>30</sup> Any Ramadhani, "Luwu Utara Darurat Perkawinan Anak," *RakyatSulsel.co*, 2023, <https://rakyatSulsel.fajar.co.id/2023/08/22/luwu-utara-darurat-perkawinan-anak/>.

at all into one family relationship. Marriage is a holy and sacred process so it shouldn't start with things that are not holy, so when someone gets married, they should start with good intentions just to fulfill religious recommendations.

"Marriage is not a place for trial and error, if we want to get married then it is better if our intentions are straightened out first, marriage is not just letting go of lust, but getting married is more than that because later it will give birth to many responsibilities with husband and wife, and this responsibility is no joke. playing husband and wife must understand and then implement it in family life" (Abd. Azis. Ministry of Religion)

The phenomenon of early marriage in North Luwu district can be seen from many reports received by the Officer of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection originating from parents, they come to report their children who have been sexually abused to the point of becoming pregnant by their lover partners. Reports like this have experienced a decline, but during the Covid-19 period, when space for movement and activities in public spaces were limited, the phenomenon of child marriage experienced a significant increase. This can be seen in Table 1, where the number of early marriages in 2021 and 2020, the years of the COVID-19 pandemic, significantly increased compared to the period before COVID-19. This was also stated by an employee of the P2PA Office. Here is a quote from the interview:

"...reports from parents of children who married young, come in almost every day. Mothers who came with their daughters who were mostly pregnant.... within this one year, reports of cases of child marriage increased to above 50 percent from the previous year... most reports came in for early marriages from the Masamba City area. maybe access to this office is easier so that many who report cases of early marriage are from the Masamba area" (Hariana, Head of P2PA).

Reports of early marriage cases are predominantly made by the parents of the girls, and these reports are often related to post-marriage issues involving domestic violence perpetrated by the husbands of their daughters. The violence can include verbal abuse and physical assault. According to an informant, the consequences of early marriage include cases of domestic violence, leading to abandonment by the husbands of these early-married couples. This situation creates new problems for the girls' families, as the marital status of their daughters becomes uncertain.

"We used to get reports from the mothers of these early marriages.... Usually it is the mothers of daughters who do the marriage who report many cases of early marriage. They report and complain about various kinds of problems, including those related to violence that occurred in their children's household after marriage. In fact, there were also those who complained that their children were simply abandoned by their husband after marriage" (Firawati, P2PA Staff)

Phenomenon of early marriage pregnancy is mostly caused by pregnancy and marriage factors. The factor of pregnancy out of wedlock is the biggest contributor to the phenomenon of child marriage in North Luwu district, unhealthy dating styles and lack of attention from parents and excessive use of gadgets are some of the reasons that many children are forced to get pregnant out of marriage, when their children pregnant out of marriage, the best and first choice for parents is to marry off their children, of course this is understandable in addition to getting the responsibility from the man's side as well as covering the family's disgrace from the results of their children's actions.

## ***D.2. Early Marriages and Online Connections***

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on various aspects of life, including social and economic patterns. One of the impacts that has been highlighted is the increase in early childhood marriage rates. One factor that is strongly suspected of contributing to this increase is the high frequency of social media use during periods of physical activity restrictions outside the home.

The use of social media has increased dramatically during the pandemic as a media of communication and entertainment amidst social restrictions. As children spend more time online, parental supervision may not always be optimal. This creates opportunities for inappropriate interactions and hasty decisions, including early marriage. This is also expressed by the parents of informants of child marriage actors

"During covid-19, my daughter played too much cellphone. Finally met a man, who is her husband now. Every day they always communicate, eventually they often go out. And married off because they were already dating" (AD, 2021)

It was also added that one of the children who came to register a report at the P2PA office stated:

"I married my boyfriend because my father was embarrassed if I go with my boyfriend. Many of my friends are married because they go and live at their boyfriend's house. In cases like mine, parents first report to the head of the local government and follow up until we are brought to this service to submit a report" (AL, 2021)

The same thing was expressed by one parents of early marriage actors:

"I forced to marry my child right away, sir, because there are so many gossip from neighbours that reach us about my son's relationship with his girlfriend who are always together, rather than bad things happening, we better get them married immediately" (AD, 2021)

The same thing was said by other informants. She, who was very very active in communicating with her boyfriend during the covid-19 pandemic. The intimate words her boyfriend wrote on social media made her accept his invitation to have sex and eventually became pregnant.

As the narrative of early marriage actors:

"I never imagined it would be like this, having a husband at a young age, but what can I do, maybe it's because of the excessive dating style that I'm like this, instead of my parents being embarrassed I finally got married" Going home with my husband, yes, there are joys and there are also difficulties in getting married young (DD, 2021)

In cases of child marriage, the majority of victims are girls who become pregnant out of marriage. The number of early marriages was revealed to be even greater when there were reports of cases of domestic violence involving families of perpetrators of early marriage. In many cases in these families there was physical violence that occurred during the marriage.

The factor of getting married sooner even though the age of their children is not sufficient is one of the reasons for justifying parents, they argue that instead of them falling into promiscuity and unhealthy courtship styles resulting in pregnancies outside of marriage they better get married immediately, another reason is children they do not want to be separated from their partners.

"Since this pandemic, there have been many complaints from parents whose children are pregnant out of wedlock. Usually they come accompanied by the child's parents (girls). From previous years until now, most of those who came reported their children who were forced to marry religiously because they were already pregnant. There were



also those who came to report because there was violence in their household...”. (Andi Zulkarnaen, Head of P2PA Office)

“If there are reports that come in, we will record them and put them on the list of reports. We classify data based on gender, age and region of origin. Indeed, since last year, more reports have come to us.... usually those who come to report here and are accompanied by officers from P2PA are mostly because the victim is pregnant. Even though they were still children, their parents were forced to marry them off. Apart from the fact that the daughter is already pregnant, some are married off because they are already dating and do not want to be separated from their partners. (Arma, P2PA Staff).

The majority of early marriages that occur are marriages without planning, because they marry because they are forced to, in fact they are not physically and mentally ready to build a *sakinah, mawaddah, warahmah* household. Even they do not fully understand the responsibilities as a husband and wife.

The information shows that they married not only because their daughter was pregnant, but also because the parents felt that there was a strong bond with their partner and it was difficult to separate them.

The rise of the dating phenomenon in adolescence is one of the factors leading to child marriage.<sup>31</sup> Teenagers see dating as a way of expressing acceptance of invitations to physical relationships, including intimate relationships.<sup>32</sup> When teenage dating relationships are restricted by the covid-19 pandemic, teenagers begin dating through social media. Through social media, teens who date virtually can send kissing emoticons or even long-distance kisses<sup>33</sup>, even videos with partners that will lead to free sex and even online prostitution.

According to Mardiyantari<sup>34</sup>, one of the factors that promotes premarital sexual behavior among adolescents is the use of social media. Teenagers who actively use social media, especially those who are not supervised by their parents, will more easily access pornographic content and lead to premarital sexual behaviour in adolescents.<sup>35</sup>

The amount number of early marriages recorded by the P2PA service shows two important things. First, the early marriage that was revealed during the pandemic shows that this practice has been going on for a long time and has formed an iceberg phenomenon. In this case the COVID-19 pandemic has brought this phenomenon to the surface. Various conflicts and violence that occurred in family households with early marriages during the pandemic, were reported, and recorded at the P2PA service, revealing the many practices of early marriages in the people of North Luwu. Second, the practice of early marriage that occurred in

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<sup>31</sup> Al'aina Zilly Tandrianti and Eko Darminto, “Perilaku Pacaran Pada Peserta Didik Sekolah Menengah Pertama Di Kabupaten Tulungagung,” *Jurnal BK UNESA* 9, no. 1 (2018): 9–15, <https://ejournal.unesa.ac.id/index.php/jurnal-bk-unesa/article/view/26269>.

<sup>32</sup> Tri Sulastri Lesteri, “Perubahan Perilaku Pacaran Remaja Sekolah Menengah Pertama,” *E-Journal Sosiatri-Sosiolog* 3, no. 4 (2015): 11–25, [https://doi.org/https://ejournal.ps.fisip-unmul.ac.id/site/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/01\\_format\\_artikel\\_ejournal\\_mulai\\_hlm\\_ganjil-1](https://doi.org/https://ejournal.ps.fisip-unmul.ac.id/site/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/01_format_artikel_ejournal_mulai_hlm_ganjil-1); Firman Sahroni, “Studi Proses Terjadinya Seks Bebas Dikalangan Remaja Smpn Desa Muara Jawaq Kecamatan Mook Manar Bulatn, Kabupaten Kutai Barat,” *EJournal Sosiatri-Sosiologi* 6, no. 2 (2018): 18–30, [https://doi.org/http://ejournal.ps.fisip-unmul.ac.id/site/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/01\\_format\\_artikel\\_ejournal\\_mulai\\_hlm\\_Ganjil-1](https://doi.org/http://ejournal.ps.fisip-unmul.ac.id/site/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/01_format_artikel_ejournal_mulai_hlm_Ganjil-1).

<sup>33</sup> Ayu Khoirotul Umaroh et al., “FENOMENA PACARAN REMAJA SELAMA MASA PANDEMI COVID-19 DI JABODETABEK,” *PREPOTIF : Jurnal Kesehatan Masyarakat* 5, no. 1 (March 12, 2021): 125–38, <https://doi.org/10.31004/prepotif.v5i1.1419>.

<sup>34</sup> Etik Mardiyantari et al., “Hubungan Media Pornografi dengan Perilaku Seksual Pranikah pada Remaja,” *STRADA JURNAL ILMIAH KESEHATAN* 7, no. 1 (May 15, 2018): 36–39, <https://doi.org/10.30994/sjik.v7i1.145>.

<sup>35</sup> Donny Japly Pugesehan, Alisye Siahaya, and Maria Magdalena Goha, “Dampak Media Sosial Terhadap Perilaku Seks Bebas Remaja,” *Karya Kesehatan Siwalima* 2, no. 1 (March 10, 2023): 21–26, <https://doi.org/10.54639/kks.v2i1.968>.

North Luwu has placed girls as the most affected victims. Table 1 shows that there is a very large gap between the number of girls who are married compared to boys in the same age group. This means that girls have become victims of older men. Hypothetically, this may be related to the tradition of arranged marriages in society. Agreements made between families tend to place girls as a commodity in the exchange process.

The high number of parents reporting about problems after early marriage not only shows the vulnerability of girls as victims but also the weakness of bonds in marriage. This is closely related to the foundation of relationships that are built on virtual and instant relationships. The intensity of using social media in this case plays a big role as a connector.

The policy of learning from home in order to prevent the emergence of school clusters has in fact raised problems. Learning activities that stem from the use of the internet, force parents to provide compatible devices for online learning by teleconferencing. At the same time, parents lose control over cell phone use. In fact, these teenagers do not only use HP to support lessons. In fact, most of them admit to using the device to play social media.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way people live, especially school children. The imposition of restrictions on community activities has also changed routine activities either partially or completely. What used to be students carrying out activities at school then changed to learning from home. Face-to-face activities with teachers turn into virtual learning activities. This online learning is automatically in line with the intensity of using technology. The frequency of using gadgets in student learning also results in parents having minimal control. On one hand, parents must limit the use of cell-phone, on the other hand, learning requires the use of gadgets. One of the parents involved in the case of early marriage said that "it's really hard to control children when they use cell phones. Sometimes the reason they study, looking for material, it turns out they use it to find acquaintances via Facebook, Instagram and others. Even my child was dancing and it turned out that later I found out that there was a tik-tok account. Sometimes I am surprised to see my child smiling to himself in front of his cell phone. (interview, Adriana, 2021). This shows that the intensity of using gadgets during the pandemic increased in line with school activities which were "closed".

Factors that cause changes in student activity from those previously preoccupied with routine preparations for school have an impact in the form of boredom. Feelings of flatness become a driving force for other activities such as making an appointment to meet other fellow students, or even friends who have the same hobby. Papalia, Feldman, and Olds says that "adolescents in general also experience changes in terms of the use of time. In most adolescents, they prefer to spend more time with peers and less with family". Furthermore, Papalia, Feldman, and Olds reveals that it is undeniable that in the lives of adolescents there are many influences from peers, peer groups for a teenager are a source of affection, sympathy, understanding, and moral demands; a place for conducting experiments; as well as means to achieve autonomy and independence from parents. Peer groups are a place to form close relationships that serve as "practice" for relationships that will be fostered in adulthood.

The COVID-19 pandemic also requires school children to reduce their mobility from one place to another. The imposition of restrictions on community activities has triggered school children to gather with friends with the excuse of carrying out school assignments. The results of an interview with one of the children who married underage revealed that the imposition of a ban on leaving the village made them bored and they looked for alternatives to gathering with friends (interview, 2021). From the statement of the Head of the P2PA service, Masamba revealed that "the high number of early marriages is caused by activities and frequent use of gadgets. Students must use cellphones when doing assignments, so children definitely use gadgets as the main tool for doing the assignments given. This cellphone is also used to connect with new people, for example looking for friends via Facebook, chatting via WhatsApp,

Instagram (interview, 2021). Thus indirectly online learning forces the frequency of using gadgets to be higher.

Several studies have shown changes in activities, especially students during the pandemic. In research conducted by Nurman Tambunan et al revealed that "Media used during online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic includes gadgets (HP) 96.4% of the majority of students nowadays don't have them".<sup>36</sup> The results showed that the routine activities carried out by students were replaced by technology. Furthermore, Markuna in her research stated that learning activities that used to be carried out in classes and with face-to-face activities, with the corona pandemic, these activities could no longer be carried out. Thus physical activity before the pandemic period is replaced by gadgets.

### ***D.3. Preventive and Curative Strategies in Overcoming Early Marriage***

The government actually already has steps to prevent early marriage. Through Law No. 1 1974 article 7 paragraph 1, the government limits the minimum age of marriage to 16 years for women and 18 years for men. This law was later revised by UU no. 16/2019 that the minimum marriage dispensation is 19 years old. However, this rule is often bypassed for reasons of 'urgency'. At the provincial level, South Sulawesi has also launched Governor Regulation No. 1/2018 regarding the Stop Early Marriage movement. This policy later became the basis for the Office of P2PA to design campaign programs to prevent early marriages.

"When we provide assistance, we always coordinate with several agencies. We coordinate with the family planning agency, also involving the civil registry office, and the Ministry of Religion and the KUA... Assistance for reported cases is routinely scheduled every month and is carried out simultaneously. Assistance is usually carried out in 2 ways, namely group assistance and individual assistance. Group assistance is scheduled and carried out routinely, while individual assistance is more for children who are victims of domestic violence." (Head of P2PA Office, 2021)

In addition to related agencies, the involvement of the North Luwu Children's Forum also has an important role in socializing the risks of child marriage. Implementation of the socialization was carried out through seminars, which involved the Health service and the P2PA service. Materials related to reproductive health were delivered by the Health Office.

"If we hold a seminar, it will involve people from the Health Office and North Luwu Children's Forum who will accommodate seminar participants. So the target is school-age children, usually junior and senior high school students" (Hariani, P2PA Office).

"To reduce the occurrence of child marriage, it is necessary to provide guidance to parents. Because the function of parents plays an important role in educating their children. There are 8 family functions, namely: religion, social culture, love, affection, protection, reproduction, socialization and education, economy, and environmental development" (Indrawati, Head of North Luwu Health Office).

Advocacy activities are carried out as a curative measure to protect victims of underage early marriage. This is done in cooperation with the KUA office by enrolling them in courses for brides and grooms.

"If there are underage couples, they are immediately educated and given an understanding of the rights of husband and wife, have a good household, *sakinah mawaddah warahma*, positive parenting... if there is a case of violence, you have to go

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<sup>36</sup> N Tambunan and I Siagian, "Analisis Lingkungan Belajar Dan Aktivitas Belajar Daring Siswa SMP Pada Masa Pandemi Covid-19," in *Seminar Nasional Dan Diskusi Panel Pendidikan Matematika*, 2020, 371–82, <http://proceeding.unindra.ac.id/index.php/DPNPMunindra/article/download/4763/752>.

through the P2PA service if you are going to proceed to trial." (Abd. Azis. Ministry of Religion)

"In cases of neglect in the household, you have to collect several files and new evidence can go to court" (Hariana, head of P2PA).

Cases of early marriage have been handled for several years before, but have not been able to reduce the number of underage early marriages. Prevention is also intensively carried out through outreach, both planned and incidental in nature. Institutions are also concerned with allocating budgets to handling child marriage, but it cannot be denied that the efforts made have not achieved the goals set.

### **E. Conclusion**

The main finding of this study is that the intensive use of technology during the COVID-19 pandemic plays an important role in the high rate of early marriage. The strong arranged marriage culture in the North Luwu area has shifted. The reason for child marriage has shifted from arranged marriage to consensual marriage. Research that places girls as objects has not placed massive exposure to technology during the pandemic as a factor that has a major influence on the increase in the number of early marriages. Relationships formed in virtual context through social media play an important role in connecting young couples. However, these relationships tend to lack the depth and stability of traditional relationships, leading to higher incidences of domestic violence and marital problems. Preventive and curative strategies, including educational seminars and advocacy programs, have shown some effectiveness in addressing early marriage, but the increase in cases during the pandemic indicates the need for a more robust and comprehensive approach to mitigate the impact of early marriage on children's rights and well-being.

This research can further serve as a reference to see that child marriage is caused by uncontrolled consumption of social media. The release of parental responsibility to negatively effect the child's future. The content enjoyed by children is not as romantic as the real conditions of living in a household, especially for those who decide to marry earlier. Further research that considers media exposure as a determinant factor in assessing the determinants of high rates of early marriage is recommended.

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