
Evaluating the Effectiveness of Islamic Family Law Reform and Public Legal Awareness in Preventing Underage Marriage in Tegal: A Study after the Enactment of Law No. 16 of 2019

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ABSTRACT

The study examines the effectiveness of Islamic family law reform and the level of public legal awareness regarding underage marriage following the enactment of Law Number 16 of 2019 in Tegal Regency and Tegal City. While the amendment, which raised the minimum legal age of marriage to nineteen for both men and women, represents a significant normative shift, the persistence of underage marriage indicates a gap between legal reform and its social implementation. This study addresses the gap by analyzing how legal awareness and socio-cultural factors influence the effectiveness of the reform at the community and institutional levels. Employing a socio-legal approach, this research integrates normative legal analysis with empirical fieldwork involving interviews, observations, and document analysis conducted with religious court officials, marriage registrars, community leaders, and affected families across selected districts in Tegal. The findings demonstrate that although the legal framework has strengthened institutional control over marriage registration, its effectiveness remains uneven due to varying levels of legal awareness, entrenched socio-cultural norms, economic pressures, and the strategic use of marriage dispensation mechanisms. The study concludes that legal reform alone is insufficient to reduce underage marriage without complementary efforts to enhance legal literacy and address structural social factors. This research recommends strengthening institutional coordination, improving community-based legal education, and reforming the dispensation mechanism to ensure stricter and more consistent application. By linking legal reform with legal consciousness and social practice, this study contributes to the discourse on the effectiveness of Islamic family law in plural and dynamic

societies, while offering policy-relevant insights for improving family law governance in Indonesia.

Keywords: Islamic Family Law Reform; Legal Awareness; Socio-Legal Studies; Underage Marriage.

Introduction

Underage marriage remains a persistent socio-legal issue in many Muslim-majority societies, despite continuous legal reforms aimed at safeguarding children's rights and promoting gender equality (Marriage, 2022). Globally, early marriage is increasingly framed not only as a cultural or religious practice but also as a violation of fundamental human rights with long-term consequences for education, health, and social welfare. In this context, the effectiveness of legal intervention becomes a crucial indicator of the state's capacity to translate normative commitments into lived social realities.

In Muslim societies, debates on underage marriage are closely intertwined with the dynamics of Islamic family law, where religious norms, customary practices, and state regulations interact in complex ways. While classical Islamic jurisprudence does not explicitly stipulate a uniform minimum age for marriage, contemporary Islamic legal reforms have increasingly adopted age restrictions to reflect changing social conditions and evolving interpretations of justice (*maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*). This shift signals an ongoing transformation of Islamic family law from a purely normative framework toward a more context-sensitive legal system.

Indonesia represents a compelling case of such transformation due to its plural legal system, where Islamic law, customary law, and state law coexist and mutually influence one another. As the world's largest Muslim-majority country, Indonesia has undertaken significant reforms in the field of family law to respond to social change, gender justice, and child protection. Nevertheless, the persistence of underage marriage practices raises questions about the actual effectiveness of these reforms at the societal level (Ibrahim, 2022).

The enactment of Law Number 16 of 2019, which amended the Marriage Law by raising the minimum legal age of marriage for both men and women to nineteen years, marked a critical turning point in Indonesia's legal approach to child marriage (Asshidqi, 2025). This amendment was intended to eliminate legal discrimination, strengthen child protection, and reduce the prevalence of early marriage through stricter legal standards. Normatively, the law reflects a progressive legal vision aligned with constitutional principles and international human rights norms.

However, empirical evidence suggests that legal reform alone does not automatically lead to behavioral change within society. Following the enactment of Law No. 16 of 2019, requests for marriage dispensation through religious courts have increased in several regions, indicating adaptive strategies employed by communities to navigate the new legal constraints. This phenomenon highlights a tension between formal legal norms (law in the books) and social practices (law in action).

The effectiveness of family law reform is therefore closely linked to the level of legal awareness and legal consciousness within society. Legal awareness encompasses not only knowledge of legal norms but also public attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions regarding the legitimacy and relevance of the law. Without sufficient legal consciousness, statutory reforms risk being perceived as external impositions rather than collectively accepted social norms (Wirya et al., 2020).

In the context of Islamic family law, legal awareness is further shaped by religious interpretations, local cultural values, and the authority of religious and community leaders (Indonesia, 2019). Communities often rely on religious legitimacy when assessing the acceptability of marriage practices, including underage marriage. Consequently, the gap between state law and religious or cultural understanding can weaken the practical authority of formal legal reforms.

Kabupaten Tegal and Kota Tegal offer a particularly relevant empirical setting for examining these dynamics due to their socio-cultural diversity and varying patterns of religious authority and legal compliance. As regions with strong Islamic traditions and active religious institutions, these areas provide insight into how legal reform interacts with local religious norms and socio-economic realities. Studying both regions allows for a comparative understanding of how similar legal frameworks operate under different social conditions.

Preliminary observations indicate that economic vulnerability, educational limitations, and social pressure continue to influence decisions regarding early marriage in these areas. For some families, underage marriage is perceived as a pragmatic solution to economic hardship or moral anxiety, despite legal restrictions. Such perceptions illustrate how structural factors can undermine the intended protective function of the law (Rizkiyah & Kamalludin, 2024).

Existing studies on underage marriage in Indonesia have largely focused on normative legal analysis or statistical trends at the national level (Mudrikah, 2024). While these studies provide valuable insights into the legal framework and prevalence of early marriage, they often overlook the interaction between legal reform and public legal awareness at the local level. There remains a notable gap

in socio-legal research that systematically explores how communities interpret, negotiate, and respond to family law reform in everyday life.

This research seeks to fill that gap by examining the effectiveness of Islamic family law reform in relation to public legal awareness regarding underage marriage after the enactment of Law No. 16 of 2019 in Kabupaten Tegal and Kota Tegal. By integrating normative legal analysis with empirical field research, this study aims to capture both the formal objectives of the law and its practical implementation within society.

Ultimately, this study contributes to broader discussions on legal reform, legal consciousness, and the transformation of Islamic family law in plural legal systems. By situating underage marriage within the interplay of law, religion, and social structure, the research offers a nuanced understanding of why legal reform may succeed or falter in practice. The findings are expected to inform future policy-making, legal education strategies, and community-based interventions aimed at strengthening the effectiveness of family law reform in Indonesia and comparable contexts (Mahira & Karjoko, 2024).

Methods

This study employs a socio-legal research approach that integrates normative legal analysis with empirical field research to examine the effectiveness of Islamic family law reform and public legal awareness regarding underage marriage after the enactment of Law Number 16 of 2019 (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The normative component focuses on analyzing statutory regulations, including the amended Marriage Law, relevant Supreme Court Regulations on marriage dispensation, and selected religious court decisions. The empirical component is conducted through qualitative methods, involving semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis to capture how legal norms are understood, implemented, and negotiated within society. Field research was carried out in Tegal Regency and Tegal City, selected for their socio-cultural characteristics and variation in legal practices related to marriage registration and dispensation. Primary data were obtained from religious court judges, marriage registrars (KUA officials), religious leaders, community figures, and families involved in underage marriage cases. Secondary data were collected from court statistics, official reports, and relevant policy documents. Data were analyzed using a qualitative interpretive approach, emphasizing thematic analysis to identify patterns of legal awareness, institutional practices, and socio-cultural factors influencing compliance with the law. This methodological design allows

for a contextualized understanding of the gap between legal reform and social practice in the implementation of Islamic family law.

Findings

Normative Strengthening and Institutional Responses to Islamic Family Law Reform

The principle of the “best interests of the child” has emerged as a central evaluative standard in judicial reasoning. In theory, this principle compels judges to move beyond social pressure or parental insistence and to prioritize long-term welfare considerations. Empirical findings from Tegal Regency and Tegal City indicate that judges increasingly reference child protection norms, health considerations, and future prospects in their decisions, reflecting an effort to internalize substantive justice within judicial practice.

The findings show that the enactment of Law Number 16 of 2019 has strengthened the normative framework governing the minimum age of marriage by equalizing the legal age at nineteen years for both men and women. At the institutional level, this reform has increased the role of Religious Courts as the primary authority in examining marriage dispensation applications, while the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) has become more assertive in refusing marriage registration that does not meet the statutory age requirement. In practice, judges no longer rely solely on formal documents, but increasingly consider substantive factors such as the child’s psychological readiness, educational continuity, family economic condition, and the possible risks of early marriage.

The findings also indicate that institutional responses to the reform remain uneven. In Tegal Regency and Tegal City, Religious Courts and KUA officials have implemented the legal changes, but their effectiveness is influenced by limited coordination, uneven administrative capacity, and the absence of specialized mechanisms for child assessment. Judges often decide cases under time constraints and with limited supporting evidence, while KUA officials frequently face resistance from families who regard age restrictions as administrative obstacles rather than protective legal norms. These findings demonstrate that the reform has strengthened institutional control over underage marriage, but its implementation remains constrained by institutional limitations and the broader social environment.

Public Legal Awareness and Socio-Cultural Negotiation of Underage Marriage

The findings reveal that public legal awareness regarding the revised minimum marriage age has increased, particularly among institutional actors and some urban communities. However, this awareness is often limited to procedural

knowledge and does not always develop into substantive acceptance of the law's protective purpose. In many families, the age restriction is seen as a technical requirement that can be negotiated rather than as a binding norm aimed at safeguarding children's welfare. This pattern indicates that knowledge of the law does not automatically translate into legal compliance.

In many community contexts, legal awareness is understood narrowly as familiarity with procedural requirements rather than as internalized recognition of the law's protective purpose. Field findings in Tegal Regency and Tegal City show that some families are aware of the legal age restriction but perceive it as a technical hurdle that can be negotiated rather than a binding normative standard. This perception weakens the transformative potential of legal reform and reinforces instrumental attitudes toward the law.

The study further finds that public responses to the reform are strongly shaped by religious authority, local custom, economic vulnerability, and social pressure. In several communities, early marriage continues to be perceived as a morally acceptable response to premarital relationships, family honor concerns, or economic hardship. Religious leaders play a decisive role in influencing public attitudes, and where religious interpretations remain permissive, the authority of state law becomes conditional. As a result, many families do not openly reject the law but instead pursue marriage dispensation as a negotiated strategy that formally complies with the legal system while preserving prevailing socio-cultural expectations. These findings show that legal awareness in Tegal is socially stratified and continuously negotiated through religious, cultural, and economic considerations.

Effectiveness, Legal Gaps, and Implications for Child Protection and Family Law Policy

The findings indicate that the effectiveness of Law No. 16 of 2019 remains limited because the reform has not fully closed the gap between legal norms and social practice. One of the clearest indicators of this gap is the continuing use of marriage dispensation mechanisms, which allow underage marriage to persist through judicial authorization. Instead of eliminating the practice, the reform has often redirected it into a more formal legal process. This condition suggests that legal reform has changed the route of underage marriage, but not yet its underlying social drivers.

The findings also show that variations in judicial decisions, the lack of standardized substantive criteria in assessing dispensation cases, and the limited coordination between Religious Courts, KUA, and social service institutions weaken the protective function of the law. In some cases, children remain

vulnerable to the educational, psychological, and socio-economic risks of early marriage because judicial and institutional responses are not always consistent or preventive in nature. These findings imply that legal effectiveness cannot be measured solely by normative reform or institutional compliance, but must also be assessed in terms of whether the law is able to reduce harmful practices and strengthen child protection in practice. Overall, the study finds that while the reform has created a stronger normative and institutional framework, significant legal and social gaps remain in its implementation.

Discussion

Normative Strengthening and Institutional Responses to Islamic Family Law Reform

The enactment of Law Number 16 of 2019 signifies a substantial normative strengthening of Islamic family law in Indonesia, particularly in relation to the regulation of marriage age (Gunawan et al., 2020). By equalizing the minimum age of marriage for men and women at nineteen years, the law introduces a more coherent legal standard aligned with principles of child protection, gender equality, and constitutional guarantees. This reform marks a departure from earlier legal ambiguities that allowed differential treatment and facilitated the persistence of underage marriage practices.

From a normative perspective, the amendment reinforces the position of Islamic family law as a dynamic legal system responsive to social change. Although classical Islamic jurisprudence does not explicitly prescribe a fixed minimum marriage age, the reform reflects a contemporary interpretive approach that prioritizes public welfare (*maṣlahah*) and the objectives of Islamic law (*maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*). In this sense, the law functions not merely as a regulatory instrument but as a normative reorientation toward substantive justice within the family law framework.

Institutional responses to this normative strengthening are most visibly manifested in the practices of the Religious Courts, which now serve as the primary gatekeepers through the marriage dispensation mechanism. The increased centrality of judicial authority in determining the permissibility of underage marriage reflects an intentional shift from administrative discretion to judicial scrutiny. This transformation underscores the state's effort to subject early marriage practices to stricter legal and ethical evaluation (Ahmad Ash Shiddieqy et al., 2025).

In implementing Law No. 16 of 2019, Religious Courts have adopted procedural adjustments, particularly in the examination of marriage dispensation

cases (Azhari & Asmuni, 2025). Judges are required to assess not only the formal completeness of applications but also the substantive conditions surrounding the proposed marriage. These include the psychological readiness of the child, educational continuity, economic capacity of the family, and potential risks associated with early marriage. Such procedural changes illustrate an expanded conception of judicial responsibility beyond formal legality.

Nevertheless, the application of this principle is not uniform and remains influenced by contextual factors. Judges often operate within socio-cultural environments where underage marriage is perceived as a moral safeguard or economic necessity. As a result, judicial discretion sometimes accommodates prevailing social norms, particularly when applicants frame early marriage as a solution to premarital relationships or social stigma. This tension reveals the limits of normative reform when confronted with entrenched cultural rationalities (Haider et al., 2018).

The role of the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) is equally significant in translating legal reform into administrative practice (Awolaye et al., 2022). As the frontline institution responsible for marriage registration, KUA officials are tasked with enforcing age requirements and directing underage applicants toward the dispensation process. The reform has strengthened KUA's formal authority to refuse registration that does not comply with statutory age limits, thereby reinforcing institutional control over marriage legality.

However, KUA officials face practical constraints in exercising this authority. In several cases, officials encounter resistance from families who perceive legal requirements as bureaucratic obstacles rather than protective measures. Additionally, the limited scope of KUA's mandate restricts its capacity to provide sustained legal education or social intervention, resulting in a reactive rather than preventive institutional role. This condition underscores the gap between regulatory authority and social influence.

The interaction between Religious Courts and KUA reflects an evolving but imperfect institutional synergy. While both institutions operate under the same legal framework, coordination in terms of data sharing, preventive outreach, and post-decision monitoring remains limited. Consequently, the effectiveness of normative strengthening depends heavily on individual institutional actors rather than a fully integrated system of child protection and family law enforcement (Purwanti & Natalis, 2026).

The findings also indicate that institutional responses are shaped by resource limitations, including judicial workload, time constraints, and the absence of specialized child assessment mechanisms (Maemunah et al., 2025).

Judges often rely on brief hearings and limited supporting evidence to make decisions with long-term implications. This structural limitation weakens the aspiration of substantive justice embedded in the reform and highlights the need for institutional capacity building.

Despite these challenges, the reform has initiated an important normative shift from formal compliance toward substantive protection. The requirement of judicial dispensation has altered the legal consciousness of institutional actors, compelling them to articulate moral and legal justifications for allowing or denying underage marriage. This shift represents a gradual transformation in how Islamic family law is interpreted and applied within state institutions.

Overall, the normative strengthening introduced by Law No. 16 of 2019 has redefined the institutional landscape of Islamic family law, particularly by expanding judicial and administrative responsibility for child protection. However, the effectiveness of this reform remains contingent upon the capacity of institutions to resist socio-cultural pressures and to operationalize substantive justice consistently. The experience of Tegal Regency and Tegal City demonstrates that while normative reform is a necessary foundation, its success ultimately depends on sustained institutional adaptation and broader social transformation (Tan et al., 2024).

Public Legal Awareness and Socio-Cultural Negotiation of Underage Marriage

Public legal awareness plays a central role in determining the effectiveness of Islamic family law reform, particularly in regulating underage marriage (Widiyanto et al., 2024). Following the enactment of Law Number 16 of 2019, awareness of the revised minimum marriage age has increased at the formal level, especially among institutional actors and urban communities. However, this awareness does not always translate into normative acceptance or behavioral compliance, indicating a complex relationship between knowledge of the law and adherence to it.

Perceptions of the legitimacy of state law significantly influence public compliance. For sections of society, particularly in rural and semi-rural areas, state regulation of marriage is often viewed as secondary to religious and customary norms. When statutory law is perceived as lacking religious grounding or cultural resonance, its authority becomes conditional and negotiable. This conditional legitimacy creates space for adaptive strategies that formally acknowledge the law while substantively circumventing its intent (Muyonga et al., 2024).

Religious authority plays a decisive role in shaping legal consciousness related to underage marriage (Suhardi, 2025). Community members frequently

rely on the opinions of religious leaders, such as kyai or local ustadz, to assess the permissibility of early marriage. Where religious discourse emphasizes moral safeguarding over legal restriction, underage marriage may be perceived as religiously legitimate despite its statutory prohibition. This dynamic illustrates how religious interpretation can either reinforce or undermine the authority of state law.

The interaction between Islamic legal understanding and positive law reveals a pattern of selective norm internalization. While some religious leaders actively support the objectives of Law No. 16 of 2019 by emphasizing child welfare and educational continuity, others maintain a more permissive stance grounded in classical *fiqh* interpretations. This diversity of religious perspectives contributes to fragmented legal awareness within society and produces varying levels of compliance across communities.

Customary norms and local social expectations further complicate public responses to legal reform. In certain social settings, early marriage is culturally framed as a responsible response to premarital relationships or as a means of preserving family honor. Such normative frameworks often exert stronger social pressure than abstract legal rules, compelling families to prioritize social acceptance over legal conformity. As a result, legal prohibitions are weighed against immediate social risks (Meidina et al., 2024).

Economic rationality constitutes another critical factor in the negotiation between law and social practice (Nur Hidayah et al., 2023). Families facing economic vulnerability may view underage marriage as a pragmatic strategy to reduce financial burdens or secure social stability for their children. In these circumstances, the long-term protective rationale of the law is overshadowed by short-term survival considerations, diminishing the persuasive power of legal norms.

These intersecting religious, cultural, and economic rationalities shape adaptive strategies toward the prohibition of underage marriage. Rather than openly defying the law, families often pursue legal dispensation as a socially and legally acceptable compromise. This strategy reflects a form of negotiated compliance, in which the law is acknowledged but strategically utilized to accommodate prevailing social norms.

The use of marriage dispensation mechanisms also reflects a broader pattern of legal pragmatism within society. Legal procedures are approached as flexible tools rather than as expressions of moral obligation. This pragmatic orientation underscores the gap between formal legal awareness and substantive

legal consciousness, where compliance is driven by feasibility rather than conviction (Muhammad et al., 2025).

The findings suggest that public legal awareness is unevenly distributed and socially stratified (Hariyanto et al., 2024). Urban communities and individuals with higher educational backgrounds tend to demonstrate stronger acceptance of the legal rationale behind age restrictions. Conversely, communities with limited access to legal information and education are more likely to rely on informal norms and authority figures when making marital decisions.

The negotiation between law and socio-cultural norms ultimately affects the overall effectiveness of Islamic family law reform. Where legal awareness is supported by religious endorsement and socio-economic stability, compliance with age restrictions is more likely. In contrast, when legal norms conflict with dominant social values or economic realities, the law's authority is diluted, and underage marriage persists through adaptive legal channels.

These findings highlight that enhancing public legal awareness requires more than disseminating legal information. It demands engagement with religious discourse, cultural narratives, and socio-economic conditions that shape community perceptions of legitimacy. In the context of Tegal Regency and Tegal City, strengthening the effectiveness of Law No. 16 of 2019 depends on integrating legal reform with community-based normative transformation that aligns state law with socially meaningful conceptions of justice (Solikhudin et al., 2026).

Effectiveness, Legal Gaps, and Implications for Child Protection and Family Law Policy

The effectiveness of Islamic family law reform following the enactment of Law Number 16 of 2019 can only be adequately assessed by examining the gap between its normative objectives and its practical implementation (Schulz, 2024). Normatively, the law aspires to prevent underage marriage, strengthen child protection, and promote substantive justice within the family. Empirically, however, the persistence of early marriage practices suggests that the law's transformative ambition has not yet been fully realized at the societal level.

One of the most visible indicators of this normative-empirical gap is the significant increase in marriage dispensation applications submitted to Religious Courts. Rather than eliminating underage marriage, the reform has redirected it into a judicial channel that allows conditional legalization. This shift raises critical questions about whether the dispensation mechanism functions as an exceptional safeguard or has evolved into a routine pathway that weakens the prohibitive intent of the law.

The rising volume of dispensation cases also places substantial pressure on the judicial system. Judges are required to balance legal norms, child protection principles, and social realities within constrained institutional settings. In practice, this pressure may lead to pragmatic decision-making that prioritizes case resolution over rigorous substantive assessment, thereby diluting the protective rationale embedded in the reform (Isokuortti et al., 2020).

Variations in judicial decisions further reflect inconsistencies in the application of the law (Bywaters et al., 2015). Differences in judges' interpretive approaches, personal values, and sensitivity to socio-cultural contexts result in divergent outcomes for similar cases. Such inconsistency undermines legal certainty and creates perceptions of unequal treatment, which in turn affect public trust in the legal system.

These variations also reveal the absence of standardized substantive criteria in evaluating marriage dispensation requests. While procedural guidelines exist, the assessment of factors such as psychological readiness, educational impact, and long-term welfare often relies on judicial discretion. This reliance on discretion, though unavoidable to some extent, opens space for subjective judgment and external social influence.

The implications of these legal gaps are particularly significant for child protection. When dispensations are granted without comprehensive evaluation, children remain vulnerable to the physical, psychological, and socio-economic risks associated with early marriage. In such cases, the law's protective promise is compromised, and the reform risks reproducing the very harms it seeks to prevent (Aji, 2024).

Beyond individual cases, the persistence of underage marriage through legal dispensations affects the broader legitimacy of family law reform (Hidayah, 2025). When communities perceive that legal prohibitions can be routinely negotiated, the normative authority of the law is weakened. This perception reinforces instrumental compliance, where legal norms are followed only to the extent that they can be strategically managed.

The findings indicate that legal effectiveness is closely linked to institutional synergy. Limited coordination between Religious Courts, KUA, social services, and educational institutions constrains the capacity for preventive intervention. Without integrated institutional frameworks, legal reform operates in isolation and remains reactive rather than preventive (Mega & Octariza, 2022).

Strengthening legal literacy emerges as a critical policy implication. Public understanding of the rationale behind age restrictions—particularly their connection to child welfare, education, and long-term social development—

remains uneven (Maymun, 2022). Legal education initiatives that merely disseminate statutory rules without engaging social values are unlikely to alter entrenched practices.

Policy responses must therefore extend beyond legal enforcement to include community-based approaches. Engaging religious leaders, community figures, and local institutions is essential to aligning legal norms with socially meaningful interpretations of justice. In plural societies, such engagement enhances the legitimacy of legal reform by embedding it within existing moral and cultural frameworks (Fatkhurrokhman et al., 2025).

The findings also suggest the need for clearer policy guidance on the use of marriage dispensation mechanisms. Establishing stricter substantive standards, multidisciplinary assessments, and post-decision monitoring could reduce discretionary inconsistencies and strengthen child protection outcomes. Such measures would help reposition dispensation as an exceptional remedy rather than a routine administrative solution.

In conclusion, the effectiveness of Islamic family law reform under Law No. 16 of 2019 depends not only on normative clarity but also on the law's capacity to reshape social practices and institutional behavior (Ridwan & Basith, 2021). The experience of Tegal Regency and Tegal City demonstrates that closing the gap between legal ideals and social reality requires a holistic policy approach that integrates legal reform, institutional coordination, and community-based normative transformation. Only through such integrated efforts can family law reform fulfill its protective and transformative objectives in a plural legal context.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the reform of Islamic family law through Law Number 16 of 2019 has strengthened the normative framework on minimum marriage age and institutional accountability; however, it also establishes that legal reform alone is insufficient to transform entrenched social practices of underage marriage. The persistence of socio-cultural norms, economic pressures, and fragmented legal consciousness shows that compliance often takes the form of negotiated adaptation rather than genuine normative internalization, revealing a persistent gap between law in the books and law in action. To address this gap, this study recommends a multidimensional policy approach: (1) strengthening community-based legal literacy programs; (2) enhancing institutional coordination among Religious Courts, KUA, and social services; and (3) reforming the marriage dispensation mechanism through stricter, standardized assessment criteria to ensure consistency and child protection. Engaging religious and

community leaders is also essential to align legal norms with socially meaningful values and to reinforce the legitimacy of family law at the grassroots level. While this research contributes to understanding the interaction between legal reform and social reality in plural contexts such as Tegal Regency and Tegal City, it remains limited to a socio-legal scope within a specific regional setting. Future research should expand to comparative and longitudinal studies to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of legal reform and policy interventions across different regions, as well as to assess how shifts in legal consciousness influence the sustainability of efforts to prevent underage marriage and promote substantive justice within the family.

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