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Integrating Child Marriage and Domestic Violence Prevention in Indonesia: A Policy Implementation Perspective

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Abstract:
Child marriage and domestic violence remain interconnected structural challenges in Indonesia despite the existence of multiple legal frameworks aimed at protecting women and children. This study argues that the prevention of early marriage and the prevention of domestic violence should not be addressed as separate policy agendas but must be integrated within a comprehensive governance framework. Using a qualitative normative-analytical approach, the research examines regulatory structures, institutional practices, and empirical data to analyze how gaps in marriage dispensation mechanisms, weak monitoring of unregistered marriages, and persistent patriarchal norms contribute to women's and children's vulnerability to violence. The findings reveal that fragmented policy implementation limits the effectiveness of current legal reforms, allowing structural risks to persist across family, cultural, and institutional contexts. The article proposes an integrated policy model that positions child marriage prevention as an upstream strategy for reducing domestic violence through multi-stakeholder dispensation reforms, strengthened marriage registration systems, and the incorporation of gender-equality and anti-violence education within national curricula. By reframing early marriage as a governance issue linked to long-term violence prevention, this study contributes to interdisciplinary discussions on gender justice, child protection, and sustainable development aligned with SDGs 5 and 16.

Keywoards: Child marriage, Domestic violence, Gender policy, Women, Children

1. Introduction

Child marriage and domestic violence remain deeply interconnected structural challenges within gender governance and human development agendas in many developing countries. While global discussions often treat these issues as separate policy domains, emerging evidence suggests that early marriage reinforces unequal power relations, increases emotional and economic dependency, and heightens vulnerability to intimate partner violence (Kidman, 2017; Putri et al., 2023). In Indonesia, policy reforms have attempted to address these problems through legal amendments and national strategies, yet the persistence of domestic violence cases indicates that regulatory change alone has not sufficiently transformed implementation practices (Komnas.Perempuan, 2024). This raises a critical question not merely about the existence of policy frameworks, but about how fragmented policy design and weak integration across sectors limit effective prevention.

Recent research highlights structural determinants such as education gaps, income inequality, and spousal disparities as predictors of intimate partner violence (Amir-ud-Din et al., 2024). However, the policy discourse often underestimates how child marriage operates as a gateway mechanism that amplifies these risks by institutionalizing unequal

marital relations at an early age. In Indonesia, the phenomenon is further complicated by cultural norms, religious interpretations, and family pressures that legitimize early marriage through dispensation mechanisms, despite legal reforms that set the minimum marriage age at 19 years. This tension between legal norms and socio-cultural practice illustrates a classic implementation gap, where policies exist formally but fail to reshape institutional behavior on the ground.

Existing studies on child marriage in Indonesia have primarily focused on demographic determinants, reproductive health outcomes, and educational disruption. While these studies provide important empirical insights, they rarely examine how domestic violence prevention strategies can be systematically integrated into child marriage policies through a governance perspective. Similarly, legal scholarship has discussed marriage dispensation and forced marriage as regulatory dilemmas (Anand et al., 2022; Monika & Djaja, 2023; Mudar et al., 2024), yet the broader implications for gender-equitable policy implementation remain underexplored. As a result, policy responses tend to operate in silos—marriage regulation, child protection, and domestic violence prevention—without a coherent integrative framework.

From a policy implementation standpoint, this fragmentation reflects deeper institutional challenges. Ambiguities in defining coercion, inconsistent recognition of unregistered marriages, and limited coordination between religious courts and gender protection agencies create gaps that undermine victim protection (Nuraeni & Hasana, 2024; Nawi & Zainuddin, 2023; Prasetia & Sebyar, 2024). These issues demonstrate that domestic violence prevention cannot be treated solely as a criminal justice issue but must be embedded within upstream governance mechanisms, including education policy, marriage registration systems, and community-based monitoring structures.

Beyond legal analysis, the integration challenge also resonates with broader debates in behavioral and social research. Studies on behavioral intention and institutional change suggest that policy effectiveness depends not only on formal regulations but also on how norms, perceived legitimacy, and social expectations shape decision-making processes (Uturestantix et al., 2022; Sineri et al., 2023). Research on consumer and social behavior in Indonesia similarly demonstrates that institutional trust and perceived value significantly influence behavioral shifts (Ivana & Uturestantix, 2018; Anggraeni et al., 2024), implying that prevention strategies must consider how individuals interpret policies within their socio-cultural environments. These insights reinforce the need to approach child marriage and domestic violence prevention through an integrated governance lens rather than isolated legal interventions.

Despite increasing policy attention, empirical data continue to reveal alarming trends. Global statistics indicate that girls who marry before the age of 15 face a substantially higher risk of experiencing domestic violence (Kidman, 2017). National reports further highlight how unequal power relations, particularly when husbands hold positions of authority such as religious leaders or public officials, exacerbate vulnerability and silence victims (Komnas.Perempuan, 2024). Such dynamics underscore the urgency of examining not only legal provisions but also institutional practices that perpetuate structural inequality.

Against this backdrop, this article argues that preventing domestic violence in Indonesia requires a paradigm shift from fragmented regulatory approaches toward an integrated policy implementation framework that bridges child marriage prevention, gender education, and institutional governance. Rather than treating early marriage and domestic violence as separate policy problems, this study positions them as mutually reinforcing phenomena embedded within broader socio-legal systems. By adopting a normative-analytical policy perspective, the article seeks to identify structural gaps between legal norms and implementation practices, analyze institutional responses through secondary data from national reports and policy documents, and propose

integrative policy pathways aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (Lepcha & Paul, 2021).

In doing so, this study contributes to the literature in three ways. First, it reframes child marriage not merely as a demographic or cultural issue but as a critical entry point for domestic violence prevention policy. Second, it advances a policy implementation perspective that highlights the role of institutional coordination and governance architecture in shaping outcomes. Third, it bridges legal analysis with behavioral and governance insights, offering a more holistic framework for understanding how gender protection policies can be operationalized in complex socio-cultural contexts such as Indonesia. By integrating these perspectives, the article aims to move beyond descriptive analysis toward theoretically informed policy recommendations that strengthen gender-equitable protection mechanisms.

2. Method

This study adopts a qualitative approach using a normative-analytical policy design to examine the integration of child marriage prevention and domestic violence governance in Indonesia. The methodological framework combines regulatory analysis, empirical literature review, and thematic examination of secondary institutional data to identify structural gaps between legal norms and implementation practices. Such an approach is appropriate for socio-legal and governance research that seeks to evaluate policy coherence rather than test causal statistical relationships (Purwanto et al., 2020; Alif et al., 2024).

First, a normative legal analysis is conducted to evaluate the Indonesian regulatory framework addressing child marriage and domestic violence. The analysis focuses on three primary legal instruments: Law No. 16/2019 concerning Marriage, Law No. 12/2022 on Criminal Acts of Sexual Violence, and Law No. 23/2004 concerning the Elimination of Domestic Violence. Particular attention is given to interpretive gaps surrounding marriage dispensation, coercion indicators, and the recognition of unregistered marriages, as these elements significantly influence the implementation of victim protection policies (Anand et al., 2022; Nuraeni & Hasana, 2024; Prasetia & Sebyar, 2024). The normative review follows a policy implementation perspective that emphasizes how institutional arrangements shape legal outcomes rather than assuming regulatory change automatically produces social transformation.

Second, this article conducts a structured literature review of international and national studies examining the relationship between early marriage and intimate partner violence. The review includes research on gender inequality, education disparities, and household power relations, as well as studies linking behavioral norms and institutional trust to policy outcomes (Kidman, 2017; Amir-ud-Din et al., 2024). In addition, insights from behavioral intention and institutional change research are incorporated to understand how social norms and perceived legitimacy influence compliance with policy interventions (Uturestantix et al., 2022; Sineri et al., 2023). This integrative perspective allows the analysis to bridge socio-legal debates with broader governance and behavioral scholarship.

Third, the study utilizes secondary data from state institutions, including the National Commission on Violence Against Women's Annual Report (Komnas Perempuan, 2024), the National Strategy for Preventing Child Marriage, and the 2020–2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN). These documents provide empirical insights into case patterns, institutional responses, and structural barriers to prevention efforts. Secondary data analysis is conducted using thematic mapping to identify recurring patterns across policy documents, institutional reports, and legal cases. The analysis focuses on three main

clusters: (1) Structural drivers of child marriage and domestic violence, including cultural norms, economic pressures, and institutional power relations; (2) Implementation gaps between legal frameworks and practice, particularly in marriage dispensation decisions and victim handling mechanisms (Monika & Djaja, 2023; Mudar et al., 2024; Nawi & Zainuddin, 2023); (3) Opportunities for policy integration, such as educational interventions, religious court governance reforms, and strengthening marriage registration systems (Van Huis & Wirastri, 2012; Lepcha & Paul, 2021).

The thematic analysis follows an iterative interpretive process, allowing categories to emerge through repeated reading and comparison of policy texts and institutional narratives. This approach aligns with qualitative policy analysis traditions that prioritize contextual interpretation while maintaining analytical rigor (Purwanto et al., 2020). To enhance credibility, findings are triangulated across legal documents, institutional reports, and scholarly literature, ensuring that interpretations reflect both normative frameworks and empirical realities.

Finally, the analytical outcomes are synthesized into policy recommendations oriented toward upstream prevention and gender-equitable governance. Rather than evaluating policy effectiveness through quantitative measurement, this study emphasizes conceptual integration and institutional alignment, offering a framework that connects child marriage prevention with domestic violence governance as mutually reinforcing policy domains.

3. Findings

The findings indicate that child marriage in Indonesia is shaped by a complex interaction between structural inequality, cultural norms, and institutional practices. Evidence shows that disparities in education, income, and age between spouses contribute to unequal power relations that increase the risk of domestic violence (Amir-ud-Din et al., 2024; Kidman, 2017). Many women who marry at a young age face emotional and psychological unpreparedness, which often leads to unstable household dynamics and conflict escalation (Putri et al., 2023). Reports from the National Commission on Violence Against Women demonstrate recurring patterns of physical, psychological, and sexual violence, highlighting how early marriage places women in structurally vulnerable positions (Komnas Perempuan, 2024). These patterns become more pronounced when husbands occupy positions of social authority such as religious leaders or public officials, reinforcing hierarchical power relations within the household.

Despite regulatory reforms aimed at preventing child marriage and domestic violence, implementation gaps remain significant. The amendment of Law No. 16/2019, which raised the minimum marriage age to nineteen, has not substantially reduced early marriage practices due to the widespread granting of marriage dispensations. Religious courts frequently approve dispensations based on pregnancy, economic pressure, or cultural considerations, reflecting tensions between legal standards and socio-cultural expectations (Monika & Djaja, 2023; Mudar et al., 2024; Nawi & Zainuddin, 2023). This situation illustrates how legal reforms alone are insufficient when institutional decision-making continues to prioritize moral and cultural arguments over child protection.

Law No. 12/2022 categorizes forced child marriage as a form of sexual violence, yet enforcement remains limited due to unclear operational indicators of coercion and the persistence of patriarchal interpretations of marriage (Anand et al., 2022; Nuraeni & Hasana, 2024). Cultural and religious norms often obscure whether a marriage is voluntary or forced, complicating the identification of victims and weakening legal protection. Furthermore, ambiguous interpretations of marriage within domestic violence law create barriers for women in unregistered marriages, who frequently face difficulties

accessing legal recognition, protection, and rehabilitation services (Van Huis & Wirastri, 2012; Prasetia & Sebyar, 2024). Komnas Perempuan reports also reveal instances of victim criminalization, demonstrating how institutional responses sometimes reinforce rather than resolve gender-based violence (Komnas Perempuan, 2024).

In the broader context of sustainable development, Indonesia has integrated child marriage prevention into national strategies aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those related to gender equality and the protection of children from violence (Lepcha & Paul, 2021). However, the findings show that policy implementation remains fragmented across institutions, resulting in gaps between regulatory frameworks and on-the-ground practices.

4. Discussion

The findings suggest that child marriage in Indonesia should be understood not merely as a cultural phenomenon but as a policy implementation challenge shaped by institutional governance and behavioral dynamics. Although legal reforms aim to strengthen child protection, persistent dispensation practices demonstrate how institutional actors reinterpret policy objectives through local moral and cultural frameworks. Behavioral research shows that individuals and institutions often reproduce established norms even when regulatory changes attempt to shift them, indicating that policy effectiveness depends on how norms are internalized rather than solely on legal enforcement (Uturestantix et al., 2022; Sineri et al., 2023). This insight explains why raising the minimum marriage age has not significantly reduced early marriage rates.

Power relations emerge as a central mechanism linking child marriage and domestic violence. When perpetrators hold religious or political authority, victims encounter additional structural barriers that limit access to justice and social support. Institutional legitimacy plays a critical role in shaping behavior, as individuals are more likely to accept hierarchical relationships perceived as socially or morally justified. Similar dynamics have been identified in studies on digital consumer behavior and institutional trust, where authority structures influence decision-making patterns (Uturestantix et al., 2018; Uturestantix et al., 2025). Translating this insight into the socio-legal context suggests that domestic violence prevention requires interventions that address institutional authority and social narratives rather than focusing solely on individual behavior.

The discussion also highlights the importance of integrated governance approaches that combine legal reform, education, and community empowerment. Strengthening multi-stakeholder coordination in marriage dispensation decisions could reduce inconsistencies between legal objectives and institutional practice (Efrinaldi et al., 2023). Improved monitoring of unregistered marriages and stronger collaboration between religious institutions, local governments, and civil society organizations may enhance victim protection and legal accountability (Van Huis & Wirastri, 2012). Educational interventions that integrate gender equality and domestic violence prevention into formal curricula also hold potential for shifting social norms at an earlier stage of life (Amir-ud-Din et al., 2024). Community empowerment initiatives demonstrate that behavioral change becomes more sustainable when legal reforms are accompanied by education, economic support, and institutional collaboration (Uturestantix et al., 2025).

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to policy implementation literature by framing child marriage as a governance nexus where legal frameworks, cultural norms, and institutional authority intersect. Rather than treating child marriage and domestic violence as separate policy domains, integrating them within a unified governance strategy offers a pathway toward more effective prevention and aligns national efforts with global commitments under the SDGs. This integrated perspective

reflects a shift from reactive legal enforcement toward proactive structural transformation, emphasizing that sustainable policy change requires coordination across legal, educational, and social systems.

5. Conclusions

This study demonstrates that child marriage in Indonesia represents a structural governance issue that reinforces unequal power relations and increases women's vulnerability to domestic violence. The findings show that although legal reforms have raised the minimum age of marriage and strengthened protection frameworks, policy implementation remains fragmented due to institutional discretion, cultural legitimacy, and inconsistent legal interpretation. As a result, legal protection often fails to translate into effective prevention, particularly in cases involving marriage dispensation and unregistered marriages.

The analysis reveals that child marriage should not be treated solely as a cultural phenomenon or individual family decision, but as an upstream determinant of gender-based violence embedded within broader governance systems. Weak coordination between legal institutions, education systems, and social protection mechanisms allows structural vulnerabilities to persist. Young women who enter marriage without psychological readiness or institutional protection are more likely to experience unequal power relations that escalate into physical, psychological, and economic violence.

To break this cycle, prevention strategies must move beyond fragmented legal responses toward integrated governance approaches. Strengthening multi-stakeholder assessment mechanisms for marriage dispensation, improving monitoring systems for unregistered marriages, and mainstreaming gender equality and violence prevention education within national curricula are essential steps toward long-term systemic change. Such integration aligns child protection efforts with broader human development goals and supports the creation of safer social environments for women and children.

Ultimately, preventing child marriage and domestic violence requires a shift from reactive enforcement toward proactive policy integration. By repositioning child marriage prevention as part of a broader governance agenda, Indonesia can strengthen institutional accountability, enhance gender equality, and advance sustainable development outcomes that protect the rights and well-being of future generations.

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