

MARRYING YOUNG IN INDONESIA: VOICES, LAWS AND PRACTICES BY MIES GRIJNS, HOKO HORII, SULISTYOWATI IRIANTO, AND PINKY SAPTANDARI (EDS.). SINGAPORE: ISEAS PUBLISHING, 2020. 336PP. ISBN: 978-981-4881-25-8

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The issue of child marriage has attracted significant attention in Indonesia in recent years due to its associated violations of human rights for the young girls. As Indonesia's parliament had raised the minimum age of marriage for girls from 16 to 19 in September 2019, Mies Grijns, Hoko Horii, Sulistyowati Irianto, and Pinky Saptandari's edited volume, *Marrying young in Indonesia: Voices, laws and practices*, provides a very timely contribution to the literature on the issue of child marriage in the country. The collections of articles in this edited volume are based on a child marriage research workshop held in the Faculty of Law, University of Indonesia, in 2017.

This volume comprises 11 chapters excluding the introduction chapter. In the introduction chapter, Hoko Horii and Mies Grijns argue that while the United Nations (UN) Committee on the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) considers that the minimum age at which both men and women can marry should be 18 years, such a category is too broad as it "ignores the diversity of child marriages and the possibility of children exercising their agency" (p. 9). They suggest that "[r]esearch and policies should consider the range of marriages (i.e., from forced to self-arranged marriages), the spousal age-gap and the degree of power (in)equality present in such marriages" (p. 9). Hence, the following chapters provide insights into these aspects and other important issues related to child marriage in Indonesia.

Based on the life stories of six victims of early non-consensual marriage in rural West Java, Chapter 1 by Regina Kalosa suggests that child marriage is a form of gender-based violence that undermines women's potential. This is especially

true during the early stage of their marriage in which they have to “adapt to their unfamiliar role as a wife and mother to take care of the household and husband” (p. 57). But the author also points out that after their children grow up, they can have more time to realise their ambitions and dreams. In other words, these women “can eventually exercise their agency” (p. 58).

Chapter 2 by Nur I’anah explores the lives of three young women who were forced to marry due to unwanted pregnancies. The study was conducted in a village next to the industrial area of Ungaran, Semarang, Central Java. The young women were not properly cared for by their parents because the latter worked as factory workers with irregular working hours. They were subsequently involved in pre-marital sexual relations with their male partners at an early age. According to the author, the male partners were either “teenagers who dropped out of school, or only graduated from junior high school (SMP)” (p. 69). After the young women became pregnant, they got married, dropped out of school, and entered into “a generational cycle of poverty” (p. 63). Since they have no other alternatives, they cannot do anything to improve their life but just accept their fate.

Chapter 3 by Nurul Ilmi Idrus reveals the consequences of child marriage not only on the young couples but also their parents. While the young couples experience self-isolation, dropping out of school and unstable marriage or divorce, their parents need to deal with financial burdens, parenting expenses and the dilemma of having teenage offspring. The author points out that the various campaigns against child marriage carried out by parents, school teachers, religious speakers and the National Family Planning Coordinating Board (BKKBN) have failed to prevent child marriage because they do not suit the needs of the teenagers. Therefore, she proposes that the community and local governments work together in procuring programmes that cater to the teenagers’ needs.

Based on their study on the experience of 15 young pregnant women in Surabaya, Hilmi Yumni and Pinky Saptandari in Chapter 4 reveal that that “the use of antenatal care is not optimal in young pregnant women” (p. 141). This is due to a lack of full awareness among young pregnant women of the importance of antenatal care. The authors argue that this has much to do with the women’s low education levels and limited employment.

Chapter 5 by Ashabul Fadhli explores the role and authority of the judges of the Batusangkar (capital of the Tanah Datar District) Religious Courts in issuing marriage dispensation to young couples. The author reveals that judges usually grant dispensation if the young couple already had a sexual relationship. Hence, the author argues that “religion is the more pressing instigator for child marriage” (p. 147).

In Chapter 6, Putu Samawati examines law enforcement and informal solutions for dating violence that involved young female teenagers in four sub-districts in Palembang, South Sumatra. The author's findings show that the legal protection of dating violence victims is very weak because law enforcement officers usually will only process cases of physical violence. With regard to sexual and psychological violence, the officers usually offer marriage as a 'peaceful' solution. The author suggests that the government collaborates with community organisations, NGOs and academics in creating policies to enforce the law and action plans to support the victims.

Chapter 7 by Evi Sukmayeti focuses on *merariq*, a controversial local tradition "which involves abducting a girl by prospective husband" that intends to prove the husband's 'masculinity' and how it contributes to the increase of child marriage within the Sasak community in Labuapi village. The author also addresses the efforts of the community in preventing child marriage through the passing of *awig-awig*, a codified customary practice, in 2013. According to the author, the *awig-awig* redefined *merariq* by incorporating Islamic norms to prevent child marriage.

In Chapter 8, Madekhan examines two types of social construction of child marriage based on the beliefs and values of the *kiai*, i.e. male Islamic religious scholars, in Lamongan, East Java. The first type is based on a literal and dogmatic interpretation of religious text that legitimates child marriage to prevent adultery. The second type is a more progressive approach emphasising the physical, social, psychological and economic maturity of both men and women before getting married. The author argues that the influence of *kiai* on their community's norms is very significant and hence, policies that aim to develop women's human resources would not be effective without acknowledging the social construction of the *kiai*.

Chapter 9 by Taufiqurrohim and Unsiyah Siti Marhamah focuses on the influence of pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) on the practices of child marriage in Yogyakarta. Their findings show that the religious texts are the basis for all of the respondents' decision to marry young.

The role of peer groups in preventing child marriage is the central theme of Chapter 10 by Meike Lusye Karolus, Shinta Candra Dewi and Partani. Based on in-depth interviews conducted with five students from four junior high schools in Yogyakarta, the authors find that peer groups enable teenagers to share, learn and understand more about reproductive health and the negative impacts of child marriage as a way to prevent child marriage.

The last chapter by Sita Thamar van Bemmelen and Mies Grijns analyses the discourses about child marriage in Indonesia from the Dutch colonial period

until the present. The point out that child marriage has been a highly contested issue over those years. The most striking similarity in the discourses in the past and present lies in the defence of child marriage by conservative Muslim leaders and the reluctance of the state to antagonise the conservative Muslim community on the issue.

From these discussions, we get to see that child marriage in Indonesia is mainly caused by poverty, a lack of sex education and reproductive health among teenagers, low education background among the young couples and their parents, as well as the influence of dogmatic religious thought. This edited volume makes an original contribution to critical discussion of child marriage in the country. It will be of greatest use to not only those interested in studying the issue of child marriage in Indonesia but also policy-makers who have the political will to resolve this issue.

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