



A psychosociospiritual collaborative governance model with marriage guidance to prevent child marriage in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

The high prevalence of child marriage in Indonesia has become a pressing issue, not only at the national but also at the global level. Preventive efforts require a collaborative and multi-faceted approach that goes beyond legal regulations and incorporates social, psychological, spiritual dimensions, as well as marriage guidance. This article aims to explore a collaborative psychosocial-spiritual governance model that integrates marriage guidance in the prevention of child marriage in Indonesia. This research was conducted using an exploratory qualitative approach in Jombok Village, Trenggalek, East Java, and Woro Village, Rembang, Central Java. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with various stakeholders including government officials, religious leaders, local psychologists and cultural figures, local activists, NGOs, as well as couples/families experiencing child marriage. The research results indicate that social innovation for preventing child marriage is implemented through the principles of collaborative governance based on a psychosocial-spiritual approach, with multi-level involvement from villages, sub-districts, to districts. Education, mentoring, and marriage counseling programs are carried out in stages, encompassing social assistance based on child protection, psychological

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support, and strengthening religious values. This approach demonstrates that effective prevention strategies are not only focused on formal regulations but also on value transformation, community capacity building, and creating an ecosystem that supports children's rights. The overall efforts aim at preventing child marriage in a more holistic, inclusive, gender-just manner, and contextualized with the local values of Indonesian society.

Keywords: Prevention of Child Marriage; Psychosociospiritual Approach; Collaborative Governance; Marriage Guidance; Gender Justice; Indonesia.

ABSTRAK

Tingginya angka perkawinan anak di Indonesia menjadi isu prioritas dan bahkan mendesak di tingkat global. Upaya pencegahan memerlukan pendekatan kolaboratif dan multi-aspek yang tidak hanya mengandalkan regulasi hukum, tetapi juga integrasi aspek sosial, psikologis, spiritual, serta bimbingan perkawinan. Artikel ini bertujuan mengeksplorasi model tata kelola kolaboratif psikososiospiritual dengan muatan bimbingan perkawinan dalam pencegahan perkawinan anak di Indonesia. Penelitian ini dilakukan dengan pendekatan kualitatif eksploratif di Desa Jombok, Tranggalek, Jawa Timur dan Desa Woro, Rembang Jawa Tengah. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan berbagai pemangku kepentingan yaitu pejabat pemerintah, tokoh agama, psikolog dan budaya setempat, aktivis setempat, LSM serta pasangan/keluarga yang melaksanakan perkawinan anak. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa inovasi sosial pencegahan perkawinan anak dilaksanakan melalui prinsip collaborative governance berbasis pendekatan psikososiospiritual, dengan keterlibatan lintas level mulai dari desa, kecamatan, hingga kabupaten. Edukasi, pendampingan, serta program bimbingan perkawinan dilaksanakan secara berjenjang, meliputi pendampingan sosial berbasis perlindungan anak, pendampingan psikologis, dan penguatan nilai-nilai keagamaan. Pendekatan ini membuktikan bahwa Strategi pencegahan yang efektif tidak hanya berorientasi pada aturan formal, tetapi juga pada transformasi nilai, penguatan kapasitas komunitas, serta penciptaan ekosistem yang mendukung hak-hak anak. Keseluruhan upaya ini bermuara pada pencegahan perkawinan anak yang lebih holistik, inklusif berkeadilan gender, serta kontekstual dengan nilai-nilai lokal masyarakat Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: Pencegahan Perkawinan Anak; Pendekatan Psikososiospiritual; Tata Kelola Kolaboratif; Bimbingan Perkawinan; Keadilan Gender; Indonesia.

1. INTRODUCTION

Child marriage remains a pressing issue worldwide. It is estimated that 12 million girls are married each year globally (UNICEF, 2020). The prevalence is higher in developing countries, where 36% of women marry before the age of 18 (UNFPA, 2022). Children who marry are more likely to experience domestic violence, disruption of education, and poverty within their households (Judiasih et al., 2020; Muhith et al., 2018; Steinhaus & Thompson,

2020; UNFA, 2015; Wodona et al., 2017; Sofiani, 2022). Moreover, children born to parents who marry at an early age are 62 times more likely to face developmental disorders (Sanjaya et al., 2018). Unfortunately, many countries remain hesitant to fully prohibit child marriage. For instance, the legal minimum marriage age for women is 13 years in Iran (Matlabi, 2013), 16 years in Afghanistan (Watson, 2021), and 18 years in India, Japan, and Australia (Pew Research Center, 2016). Even so, children below these legal thresholds can still marry legally through dispensations granted by local courts, often based on religious or cultural considerations (Steinhaus & Thompson, 2020).

From psychological perspectives and social norms such as religion and culture, at least three main trends can be identified in the study of child marriage. First, descriptive studies describe the phenomenon of child marriage in various countries, both quantitatively and qualitatively, including in the United States (Ellison & Xu, 2014; Uecker et al., 2017), the Netherlands (Studer et al., 2018), and Bangladesh (Bhowmik et al., 2021; Kamal et al., 2015). These studies also reveal that religion is a demographic factor closely related to child marriage (Kohno et al., 2020; Rumble et al., 2018; Subramanee et al., 2022). Second, normative studies analyze formal legal reasoning and religious perspectives on preventing child marriage. Examples include analyses of Sweden's Statens Offentliga Utredningar (SOU) (Manga, 2022), Indonesia's Law No. 16 of 2019 (Mursyid & Yusuf, 2022), child marriage from the perspective of Islamic law (Mobolaji et al., 2020), and discussions on how it violates children's rights (Tobing, 2018). Third, there are studies on societal attitudes and perceptions. These works examine perspectives, values, and beliefs that normalize child marriage across different contexts (Muhith et al., 2018).

In Indonesia, child marriage remains prevalent despite Law No. 16/2019, which raised the minimum marriage age for women from 16 to 19 years. Ethnographic studies show that conservative religious views continue to normalize child marriage, becoming the main obstacle to effective implementation of the law (Grijns & Horii, 2018). In practice, these views are accommodated through marriage dispensations (Horii, 2021), reflecting ongoing tensions between progressive and conservative interpretations. (Horii, 2020) further argues that this conservative religious perspective, often tied to tradition, remains a blind spot within international human rights frameworks addressing child marriage. This suggests that legal reforms alone are insufficient without addressing the deeply rooted religious and cultural norms sustaining early marriage practices.



Figure 1. The number of child marriages in Indonesia before and after the implementation of Law No. 16 of 2019. (Source: lokadata.id)

These conditions illustrate that legal-structural approaches alone have not effectively reduced child marriage. Formal regulations exert limited influence over entrenched social norms, exposing a gap between state policy and community values. Addressing this complexity requires contextual, adaptive, and collaborative strategies that incorporate social, psychological, and spiritual dimensions, particularly given the strong influence of religion and culture in Indonesia. This article addresses that gap by proposing a psychosociospiritual collaborative intervention grounded in gender justice principles. The novelty of this approach lies in its governance model, which integrates psychosocial, spiritual, and gender-justice dimensions within a multi-level framework involving villages, sub-districts, and regencies. Unlike strategies that rely solely on law enforcement or formal education, this model frames cultural and religious traditions as resources for transformation, offering a more holistic and effective pathway to prevent child marriage while advancing gender equity.

The contribution of this study is both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it develops a holistic, contextual, and culturally sensitive governance model. Practically, it supports innovative intervention policies and community education, especially in regions with high prevalence of child marriage and resistance to purely formalistic solutions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Child Marriage Prevention

Scholarly research often uses the term “child marriage” interchangeably with “early marriage” or “underage marriage.” UNICEF (2023) defines child marriage as a formal marriage or informal union between a child under the age of 18 and an adult or another child. Marriage inherently comprises conflicting dimensions. On one hand, culture and religion are fundamental to marriage and marital behavior. For instance, regarding the timing of marriage, religious

individuals are more likely to marry earlier compared to those who are less religious (Brauner-Otto & Pearce, 2020; Ellison & Xu, 2014; Studer et al., 2018). A large body of literature also confirms that religion and culture are significant factors influencing child marriage (Hajihasani & Sim, 2019; Kamal et al., 2015; Septiarum et al., 2019). On the other hand, marriage is also regulated by the state as a means of ensuring the well-being of its people. For example, the Indonesian government submitted the draft Marriage Law Bill to Parliament in 1973, partly to enhance women's rights in marriage (Pompe & Otto, 1990). This reflects the state's role as an institutional factor governing marriage in society (Studer et al., 2018; Kirana & Nisak, 2022). The enactment of child marriage prevention laws, therefore, often creates tension between the state—representing progressive ideas—and religion and culture, which embody more conservative views of marriage.

2.2. The Stigma of Women in Society Regarding Child Marriage

In the socio-cultural context of Indonesia, women are often directly affected by social constructions that normalize child marriage. Stigmas against women appear in various forms, ranging from the perception that women are a “burden” to their families to the notion that it is better to marry young than to remain unmarried into adulthood. These views not only reflect gender inequality but are also rooted in the patriarchal system that shapes women's roles and values in society (Utomo et al., 2016).

According to a study by Plan International (2015), social perceptions of unmarried women at a certain age tend to be negative, with some even labeling them as failures in fulfilling their destiny. This pressure encourages parents to marry off their daughters earlier as a form of “protection” for the family's honor (Chesler & McGovern, 2015). At the same time, teenage girls often lack opportunities to voice their aspirations regarding life choices, including education and marriage (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2020).

These negative stereotypes are exacerbated by limited access to higher education and reproductive health information, contributing to unequal power relations between men and women within households—inequalities that are often formed from a young age through child marriage (Kooij, 2016; Pakasi et al., 2024). Women are frequently positioned as objects of social control regarding purity, honor, and domestic roles, with child marriage seen as a solution to fears of promiscuity, out-of-wedlock pregnancy, or economic burdens on families. In patriarchal societies, women are often considered to have little “value” until they are married (Kooij, 2016; UNFPA, 2013; UNICEF, 2020).

2.3. Collaborative Strategies Based on Psychosocial-Spiritual Aspects: Preventive Efforts to Prevent Child Marriage

The psychosocial-spiritual collaborative strategy is an innovative approach that combines social, psychological, and spiritual aspects in preventing child marriage. It emphasizes cross-sector collaboration, involving village governments, religious leaders, civil society organizations, and educational institutions. This approach is particularly effective in the Indonesian context, which is deeply rooted in religious values and local culture (Agustin, 2022). This collaborative strategy addresses three key dimensions: personal (psychological), structural (social), and values (spiritual). Cross-sector collaboration and active community involvement foster sustainable social transformation, especially in shifting perspectives on women,

education, and children's rights. Collaborative governance serves as the foundation of this strategy, with programs planned and implemented jointly by multiple stakeholders. This creates strong ownership and enhances program sustainability (Zuhdi, 2021, Ansell & Gash, 2008).

3. METHOD

This study focused on social innovation in preventing child marriage in Indonesia through psychosocial-spiritual collaborative strategies. It employed an exploratory qualitative approach in two high-prevalence areas: Jombok Village, Trenggalek (East Java) and Woro Village, Rembang (Central Java). Data were collected simultaneously using an inductive comparative method through in-depth interviews, documentation, and relevant primary and secondary sources.

Research subjects included multi-sector stakeholders: government officials (KUA, DP3A, Religious Court, village authorities), the Marriage Office, the Women's Empowerment and Child Protection Agency, religious leaders, midwives, educators, psychologists, cultural figures, NGOs, and local activists, as well as families and couples directly involved in child marriage. These informants provided insights into prevention policies, challenges in implementing Law No. 16 of 2019, and the influence of local pressures on requests for marriage dispensations. They also shared perspectives on societal and religious views, socialization practices, and the lived experiences of women and children. Data analysis followed Miles & Huberman's (1994) model of data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. Verification and triangulation across sources and informants were applied to strengthen credibility and transferability. Findings were organized around the three central research questions and cross-analyzed with relevant literature.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. *The Phenomenon of Child Marriage and the Social Transformation of Community Perspectives*

Woro Village in Rembang Regency and Jombok Village in Trenggalek Regency represent areas with persistently high child marriage rates. Before 2009, Woro recorded 10–15 cases annually, while in 2022 Rembang documented 232 cases (17 boys and 215 girls). In Trenggalek, the numbers rose sharply from 456 cases in 2020 to 956 in 2021. These trends are associated with low levels of education, farming-based livelihoods, and strong stigmatization of women in rural communities. Resistance to prevention efforts initially came from religious leaders who argued that Islam does not prescribe a minimum age for marriage as long as individuals are “capable,” a stance that conflicted with Law No. 16/2019, which requires both men and women to be at least 19 years old.

In practice, many cases were driven by coercion, parental burdens, and entrenched cultural beliefs, such as the notion that “it is better to be a young widow than an old maid.” Awareness campaigns led by midwives, health workers, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs highlighted health risks and high divorce rates among underage couples. Gradually, dialogue softened resistance, leading to greater acceptance of state regulations. Prevention efforts were then institutionalized through collaboration between KUA, social services, KPAD, schools, and village child forums supported by village funds. According to the Head of KPAD Woro, the

committee's mission is "to postpone child marriage and protect children so they can continue their education to a higher level."

"We have socialized the zero percent child marriage program many times, especially for communities with low education or strong traditions. Often, customs dictate specific marriage dates, creating conflict when the village must issue a recommendation letter to the KUA." (Head of KUA Pule Sub-district, interview, June 6, 2023)

The presence of village regulations has positively impacted child marriage prevention by reducing cases and shifting community mindsets. Policymakers work directly with communities through ongoing socialization, mediation, assistance, advocacy, and consultations on child protection. Continuous socialization and FGDs involve all elements of society in a comprehensive manner.

"Socialization reaches all 22 neighborhood units (RT), we, the village officials, are involved in socializing to each RT in Woro, gathering all community members, including gatherings of fathers, mothers, and children. They are invited to come together to be educated about the importance of education for children and the dangers of child marriage. Almost every day we go around, ma'am, to socialize with all RTs." (Interview with the Head of Woro Village).

Village-level programs have contributed to changing community perspectives by raising awareness of education and the risks of child marriage. Parents are beginning to adopt more progressive views toward their daughters, no longer perceiving them as family burdens. Nevertheless, lingering concerns about marriage prospects continue to pressure families into considering early unions. Child marriage, once normalized, is now increasingly recognized as harmful to girls' health and as a driver of poverty and low welfare, particularly following the implementation of local regulations.

"Child marriage creates further problems. In our village, we promote inclusive solutions for out-of-school children. Previously, pregnant girls had to attend distant PKBM centers, but now village heads are required to organize local study groups so schools cannot expel them." (Women's Activist, Jombok Village, 6 June 2023).

The evidence above shows that social transformation in child marriage prevention occurs through a long process involving cross-sector dialogue, community education, and the strengthening of local regulations (Kooij, 2016; UNICEF, 2018; Bappenas, 2020). Psychologically, this reflects a cognitive shift in society from normative acceptance of child marriage to an awareness of its negative impacts on children's mental, emotional, and future development, especially for girls (Santrock, 2019; UNICEF, 2018). From a gender perspective, it highlights how patriarchal constructions that position women as burdens or subordinates are gradually being deconstructed through education and collective awareness (Connell, 2012; Patel, 2022; Berger & Luckmann, 2021). This transformation reflects progress toward gender equality, where women are increasingly recognized as active agents in family and village development, rather than mere objects of early marriage.

4.2. Marriage Guidance: Preventive Efforts to Prevent Child Marriage in Indonesia

The KUA implements the BIMWIN (Marriage Guidance) program to prepare couples for marriage by strengthening their physical, psychological, and spiritual readiness, as well as knowledge of rights, responsibilities, and family harmony, as stated by Mr. Cholid, a counselor at KUA Kragan District, Rembang Regency, he said:

“The KUA here implements several programs mandated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, including Marriage Guidance (BIMWIN). This activity equips prospective brides and grooms with materials about family counseling for a Sakinah family, so that they are prepared to build a household, starting from understanding the rights and responsibilities of husbands and wives in Islamic law to knowledge about reproductive health.”

According to the KUA counselor, child marriage increases divorce rates; hence, marriage counseling is essential to strengthen couples' readiness for household life. This is as stated in the interview with Mr. Amin Musa, the Head of KUA Kragan, as follows:

The divorce rate in Kragan is quite high. The average major factors leading to divorce in household life are child marriage, economic issues, and the lack of mental readiness of the husband and wife in building a household, which leads them to understand less about the true meaning of marriage. BIMBIN is conducted by giving advice to the prospective bride and groom before the wedding takes place, in order to achieve welfare and happiness in a marital bond both in this world and in the hereafter.

From these explanations, it can be concluded that the KUA plays a vital role in preparing couples for stable and harmonious households, as household stability is fundamental to family well-being.

However, BIMWIN in Rembang Regency has not yet reached optimal coverage. With around 5,000 prospective couples annually, budget constraints allow only 16 batches per year (30 couples per batch), reaching just 480 couples—less than 10%. The program is implemented in collaboration with BP4, PKBI, and women's organizations such as Fatayat, emphasizing female facilitators for more effective approaches. Conducted over two days, BIMWIN covers six core themes: planned marriage, family management, household needs, reproductive health, quality offspring, and conflict management, along with introductory sessions, expectations, contracts, and closing reflections.

The Marriage Guidance Program (BIMWIN) is a key preventive effort against child marriage and its negative consequences such as divorce, conflict, and psychosocial unpreparedness. As premarital counseling, it enhances couples' adaptive capacity through education on communication, gender roles, decision-making, and resilience (Knox & Schacht, 2008; Vik, 2024). This is especially crucial for adolescents, who are still in the stage of identity formation (Arnett, 2000; Santrock, 2019). Helping them build maturity before marriage is vital (Bakhurst et al., 2017). Evidence shows that premarital preparation improves emotional regulation and readiness (Halford et al., 2003), reduces risks of violence (UNFPA, 2013), and supports marital stability. In Indonesia, where child marriage remains prevalent, expanding

BIMWIN and improving facilitator quality represent strategic policy directions (Stanley et al., 2020; UNESCO, 2019; UNICEF, 2023).

4.3. Collaborative Strategy of Psychosociospiritual Aspects as A Form of Advocacy for the Prevention of Child Marriage in Indonesia

The psychosocial-spiritual collaborative strategy has proven effective in preventing child marriage in rural contexts such as Woro Village (Rembang) and Trenggalek Regency. Emerging from local needs, it was developed through cross-sector collaboration among government agencies (Social Service P3AP2KB, KUA, Religious Court), community institutions (KPAD, PKK, Child Forum), schools, NGOs, religious and cultural leaders, and families. This strategy integrates psychological, social, and spiritual interventions. Psychologically, prevention is carried out through counseling for adolescents and parents on mental, emotional, and health risks, as well as programs to build adolescents' self-esteem, decision-making capacity, and future orientation. As stated by the Woro KPAD, "We regularly conduct outreach to children about the dangers of early marriage. Many initially do not know the psychological and health risks, so we start from there." This aligns with Santrock (2019), who emphasized that adolescence is a critical stage for identity formation and independence, requiring strong psychological support to resist pressures toward early marriage.

Socially, this strategy is realized through the formation of community structures responsive to child protection, such as establishing Village Child Forums, drafting Child-Friendly Village Regulations, and strengthening the role of schools as agents of social oversight. The Head of the Dusun in Woro Village stated: "Almost every day we go around, Miss, to socialize with all RTs... we gather all segments of society, there are groups for fathers, mothers, and also children." The Head of the KPAD in Woro Village also stated: "The purpose of establishing KPAD is to postpone child marriage and to provide protection for children." By postponing the marriage of children, it is hoped that the village youths can continue their education to a higher level." This finding strengthens the theory of Berger & Luckmann (2021) that social reality is formed through collective interactions that create new meanings in society.

In the spiritual dimension, this strategy highlights the importance of involving religious leaders to align religious values with child protection principles. Initially, resistance came from some religious figures who argued that "being of mature age and capable" was sufficient for marriage. However, through dialogue and education based on maqashid sharia, change began to take place. The head of the Pule District KUA emphasized: "We have repeated the message of zero percent child marriage to the community many times, because the understanding needs to be reiterated, especially for communities that are still unaware and have low education." This reinterpretation of religious values aligns with Saeed's (2005) argument that "reinterpretation of religious texts in response to new contexts is not a deviation, but rather a necessity in maintaining the moral and ethical spirit of Islam" (p. 118).

The three psychosociospiritual approaches operate within a collaborative governance framework (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson et al., 2012), emphasizing inclusive dialogue, trust-building, and shared decision-making. In practice, this is reflected in initiatives such as study groups to keep children in school, with activists stressing that even pregnant girls should not be expelled. Such efforts demonstrate that advocacy for children's rights emerges not only from structural policies but also from social relations and collective values. Thus, collaboration

functions both as a technical mechanism for prevention and as a medium of social transformation, reshaping community views on women, children, education, and religion. Compared with purely legal-formal approaches, this holistic and dialogic strategy has proven more effective in reducing child marriage and strengthening collective awareness that children's rights are a shared responsibility (Emerson et al., 2012).

4.4. Child Marriage From the Perspective of Gender Justice

Child marriage in Indonesia reflects structural injustice that perpetuates gender inequality, with girls as the main victims due to cultural norms and conservative religious interpretations. The narrow conception of aqil baligh as mere physical maturity disregards psychological and social readiness, reinforced by the overlap between state and religious laws (Horii, 2020; Mahmuddin et al., 2023). Field findings reveal that stigma pressures parents to marry off their daughters early, fearing gossip or the label “old maid.” As one community member explained: “If a girl has started menstruating, it means she is mature. If there are suitors, then she must accept them. Parents are afraid that if it takes too long, she will become a topic of gossip” (Interview, Mrs. N, 50 years old, May 12, 2024). These findings are consistent with Plan International and Coram International's conclusion that stigma and negative stereotypes force young women into early marriage (Yarrow, E., 2015; Rumble et al., 2018).

Butler's theory of gender performativity illustrates how female identity is constructed through roles as wife and mother, reinforced by religion and family institutions (Butler, 2011, Butler, 2022). This is echoed in a girl's statement: “I am afraid of being seen as rude if I refuse a proposal. Parents say that women should be obedient” (Interview, R, 16 years old, April 20, 2024). Religious legitimacy is also often invoked without considering maqashid al-shariah (Zaprul Khan, 2018; Syihab, 2023). As Mackinnon (2023) argues, marriage functions as a patriarchal mechanism of control over women's bodies, reinforced by dual domestic and public roles (Sevi Nur Jannah, 2022; Putri Efendi & Wahyuningsih, 2024). Cultural stereotypes—such as expectations that women must accept proposals or marry early to protect family honor—normalize child marriage (Connell, 2012; Solodyankina & Polishchuk, 2021). These patterns underscore the urgency of gender-sensitive, participatory interventions involving the state, religion, and civil society.

5. CONCLUSION

This research confirms that child marriage in Indonesia is a multidimensional issue rooted in cultural, religious, economic, and patriarchal structures. Legal regulation alone is insufficient; prevention requires a holistic strategy integrating psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions. The psychosociospiritual collaborative model developed locally demonstrates that cross-sector cooperation, community participation, and contextual religious approaches can effectively reduce child marriage while fostering social transformation in views on gender and children's futures. The study recommends replicating this model in other regions with adaptations to local socio-cultural contexts, while expanding youth involvement through child forums and strengthening the role of religious leaders in spiritually based campaigns. Such efforts are essential to ensure sustainable, gender-sensitive, and community-rooted strategies for child marriage prevention at the national level.

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