



AL-WIJDAN: *Journal of Islamic Education Studies*.
Volume 9, Number 4, Oktober 2024, p-ISSN: 2541-2051; online -ISSN: 2541-3961
Available online at <http://ejournal.uniramalang.ac.id/index.php/alwijdan>

Received: September 2024

Accepted: September 2024

Published: Oktober 2024

The Role of the Religious Affairs Office in Reducing Early Marriage (Implementation of Law No. 16 of 2019 in Sidowayah Village, Pancur District, Rembang Regency)

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Abstract

This research aims to examine the role of the Religious Affairs Office (KUA) and the effectiveness of the implementation of Law No. 16 of 2019 in reducing early marriage in Sidowayah Village. The research method used is descriptive qualitative with a phenomenological approach. Data was collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. The results showed that the KUA in Sidowayah Village plays an active role in socializing future bride and groom in the community about the dangers of early marriage and the provisions of Law No. 16 of 2019. The KUA's efforts have increased the community's understanding of the negative impacts of early marriage and children's rights. The implementation of Law No. 16 of 2019 has shown positive results by increasing public awareness of the minimum age for marriage. Education programs related to the dangers of early marriage and children's rights have shown positive results with indications of a decrease in the number of early marriages. However, there are several challenges in the implementation of this law, such as a lack of public awareness of the importance of complying with the law, strong cultural resistance in some environments, inconsistent law enforcement against violations of underage marriage, and social structures that support early marriage such as poverty and gender inequality. This research provides an overview of the role of KUA and the effectiveness of Law No. 16 of 2019 in efforts to reduce early marriage. Continuous and collaborative efforts from various parties, such as KUA, local government, and the community, are needed to address early marriage and achieve children's welfare.

Keywords: Early marriage, Law no. 16 of 2019, KUA

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji peran Kantor Urusan Agama (KUA) dan efektivitas implementasi UU No.16 Tahun 2019 dalam upaya mengurangi pernikahan dini di Desa Sidowayah. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah deskriptif kualitatif dengan pendekatan

fenomenologi. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa KUA di Desa Sidowayah berperan aktif dalam menyosialisasikan dan mengedukasi masyarakat tentang bahaya pernikahan dini dan ketentuan UU No.16 Tahun 2019. Upaya KUA meningkatkan pemahaman masyarakat terhadap dampak negatif pernikahan dini dan hak-hak anak. Implementasi UU No.16 Tahun 2019 menunjukkan hasil positif dengan meningkatkan kesadaran masyarakat tentang usia minimum pernikahan. Program penyuluhan terkait bahaya pernikahan dini dan hak-hak anak menunjukkan hasil positif dengan indikasi penurunan angka pernikahan dini. Namun, terdapat beberapa tantangan dalam implementasi UU ini, seperti kurangnya kesadaran masyarakat tentang pentingnya menaati UU, resisten budaya yang kuat di beberapa lingkungan, penegakan hukum terhadap pelanggaran pernikahan di bawah umur yang belum konsisten, dan struktur sosial yang mendukung pernikahan dini seperti kemiskinan dan ketimpangan gender. Penelitian ini memberikan gambaran tentang peran KUA dan efektivitas UU No.16 Tahun 2019 dalam upaya mengurangi pernikahan dini. Diperlukan upaya berkelanjutan dan kolaboratif dari berbagai pihak, seperti KUA, pemerintah daerah, dan masyarakat, untuk mengatasi pernikahan dini dan mencapai kesejahteraan anak-anak.

Kata Kunci: Pernikahan dini, UU No.16 Tahun 2019, KUA

Introduction

The practice of early marriage is still widespread in Indonesia, especially in the community of Sidowayah Village located in Pancur District, Rembang Regency. This habit has a major negative impact on the health, education, and overall welfare of young women. The legal framework has evolved along with the amendment to the Marriage Law, as stated in Law No. 16 of 2019, which raises the minimum age for marriage for women from 16 to 19 years. The implementation of this policy is highly dependent on the Ministry of Religion which plays an important role in reducing the prevalence of early marriage.

According to the latest statistics, Indonesia has one of the highest rates of early marriage, ranking eighth globally and second in the ASEAN region, with nearly

1.5 million cases reported by the end of 2022, according to UNICEF data. The issue has been highlighted by the increasing demand for early marriage exemptions, which jumped to 55,000 in one year, as reported by BBC Indonesia. Certain provinces, including West Nusa Tenggara, South Sumatra, and West Kalimantan, show very high rates of child marriage, accounting for more than 10% of all marriages in the region, as noted by Kompas.

The impact of early marriage is very widespread, starting from the health sector with an increased risk of maternal and infant mortality, stunting, and pregnancy complications, to the education sector which hinders access to and continuity of education for children, especially girls.¹. Economically, this practice can also worsen family poverty and reinforce the cycle of

poverty and social backwardness in society. To address this problem, various prevention efforts have been made, including increasing socialization about the dangers of early marriage, stronger law enforcement related to underage marriage, economic empowerment to increase access to education and employment opportunities for women, and changing social norms that support early marriage. With this holistic approach, it is hoped that it can reduce the prevalence of early marriage in Indonesia and improve the quality of life for the younger generation, especially women and children. The custom of early marriage still occurs in many parts of Indonesia, especially in Sidowayah Village located in Pancur District, Rembang Regency. This tradition has a major negative impact on the health, educational prospects, and welfare of young women in the community.². Teenagers who marry early often face the possibility of dropping out of school, face increased risks to reproductive health, and contribute to increased maternal and infant mortality rates. In addition, early marriage often exacerbates poverty in the community.

The enactment of Law No. 16 of 2019, which is an amendment to the previous Marriage Law (Law No. 1 of 1974), mandates an increase in the minimum age for marriage for women from 16 years to 19 years. This adjustment to the law is expected

to be an important step in protecting children's rights and improving their overall welfare. The Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) is recognized as playing an important role in implementing the policy, which aims to reduce the number of early marriages.³. The issue of early marriage, commonly referred to as child marriage, presents a variety of challenges in Indonesian society. This occurs when individuals, especially minors, marry before reaching the legally recognized age to agree to such a commitment. The consequences of these early unions are far-reaching, affecting the physical health, educational opportunities, and overall social development of the young people involved. According to a report from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), Indonesia has a fairly high rate of child marriage, especially in remote rural communities.

Sidowayah Village is one of the areas facing the problem of early marriage, which is influenced by various factors, including economic hardship, limited educational opportunities, deep-rooted cultural traditions, and community expectations. As a joint effort to address these challenges, the Indonesian government has issued Law Number 16 of 2019, which revises the existing Marriage Law (Law Number 1 of 1974) by raising the minimum age for marriage for women from 16 to 19 years.

This legislative action is strategically aimed at protecting children's rights and reducing the number of child marriages throughout the country. In addition, this law underlines the government's commitment to aligning national policies with international standards on child protection and improving the welfare of young individuals. The Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) as the government agency responsible for marriage affairs has an important role in implementing this law. KUA is not only tasked with registering marriages but also has the responsibility to provide education and socialization regarding the new marriage regulations and the negative impacts of early marriage.

The level of resilience in the relationship of husband and wife who marry at a young age is often relatively short or does not last long, becoming an important addition in the context of the background of the research on early marriage in Sidowayah Village. Previous studies have shown that marriages that occur at a young age are often less mature emotionally and financially, which can result in a lack of trust and communication in the relationship. These factors significantly contribute to the higher risk of divorce among couples who marry at a young age.⁴

The study also identified that young couples often face challenges in managing the differences in individual needs and

expectations, which develop with age and life experience. This highlights the importance of a holistic approach in understanding the long-term impacts of early marriage on family stability and social well-being at the community level such as Sidowayah Village. Thus, a deeper understanding of these dynamics is expected to strengthen the theoretical basis in evaluating the effectiveness of policies and intervention programs aimed at reducing early marriage rates and improving the resilience and quality of marital relationships in the community.

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent of the involvement of the Religious Affairs Office (KUA) in limiting early marriage in Sidowayah Village and to evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of Law Number 16 of 2019. It is hoped that this study will produce a holistic understanding of the influence of KUA initiatives in reducing cases of early marriage and the obstacles faced in enforcing this law. These findings are also expected to provide a very valuable perspective for the government and related institutions in their efforts to address the problem of early marriage in Indonesia so that it can contribute to the formulation of more effective policies and interventions.

Method

The research methodology used is descriptive qualitative using a phenomenological lens. The research was conducted in Sidowayah Village with participants such as employees of the Religious Affairs Office (KUA), local communities, and couples who have early marriages. Data collection was facilitated through in-depth interviews which played an important role in explaining the role of KUA in mitigating early marriage and assessing the effectiveness of the implementation of Law Number 16 of 2019. In addition, participatory observation was also conducted to gain direct insight into the problems of early marriage, social dynamics, and customs of marriage that are common in the village. Documentation, including marriage records and materials from socialization activities, served as additional data sources, providing a strong foundation for analysis and interpretation in the research.⁵

This study included three different participant groups: employees of the Religious Affairs Office (KUA), local communities, and couples engaged in early marriage. Data acquisition was achieved through a triad of methods: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation review. Data analysis was conducted using a thematic approach, which allowed for the identification of important

themes and resulted in comprehensive research results. This methodological framework ensured a nuanced understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, facilitating the drawing of well-supported conclusions. The researcher observed research ethics, including informed consent, confidentiality, and honesty. Despite some limitations such as sample size, research duration, and access to information, this research method is expected to produce valid and credible findings to understand the phenomenon of early marriage in Indonesia and formulate more effective strategies to overcome it.

Results and Discussion

The results of the study show that the KUA in Sidowayah Village plays an active role in socialization and education regarding the dangers of early marriage and the provisions of Law No. 16 of 2019. However, there are several challenges in implementing this policy, such as a lack of public awareness and local cultural resistance. In general, there has been a decrease in the number of early marriages since the enactment of Law No. 16 of 2019⁶. The KUA in Sidowayah Village has played an active role in conducting socialization and education regarding the dangers of early marriage and the provisions contained in Law No. 16 of 2019. These efforts aim to increase public understanding of the

negative impacts of early marriage on the welfare of children and families. However, the implementation of this policy faces several challenges, including a lack of public awareness of the importance of complying with the provisions of the law and the existence of strong cultural resistance in some environments.⁷ Law No. 16 of 2019 concerning Amendments to Law No. 1 of 1974 concerning Marriage is an important legislative step in efforts to overcome early marriage in Indonesia. However, the results of the discussion showed several findings related to the implementation and effectiveness of this law. First, there is an increase in public awareness and understanding of the legal provisions governing the minimum age of marriage, especially after intensive socialization efforts by the government and related institutions. The counseling programs that have been held have succeeded in increasing awareness of the dangers of early marriage and the rights of children to receive proper education and protection. However, the implementation of this law still faces significant challenges. Several obstacles identified include cultural resistance in the community that still maintains the practice of early marriage as part of strong social norms. In addition, law enforcement against violations related to underage marriage is still inconsistent in various regions, despite

an increase in the number of dispensations submitted to religious courts.

The effectiveness of this law is also limited in changing the social structures that support early marriage, such as poverty and gender inequality which are the main driving factors of this practice. Efforts to increase access to education and economic opportunities for women and deeper changes in social norms still require time and ongoing efforts. Overall, Law No. 16 of 2019 has provided a stronger legal basis for protecting children from the risks of early marriage. However, to achieve significant changes in reducing the prevalence of early marriage, closer cross-sectoral collaboration, strengthening of law enforcement, and ongoing efforts to change social norms and address existing structural inequalities are needed.⁸ In addition, this study found that the counseling program on the dangers of underage marriage and the risks it causes for men and women has had a positive impact. The counseling not only raised awareness of children's rights and the importance of education but also helped change public perceptions of early marriage practices. Overall, there are indications of a decrease in the number of early marriages since the enactment of Law No. 16 of 2019, although further efforts are needed to overcome the challenges that still exist in its implementation.⁹

Class for Brides and Grooms for Reproductive Health, Violence Prevention, and Empowerment. Class for brides and grooms (Future bride and groom) is a strategic forum to increase the knowledge and understanding of young couples about various important aspects of building a healthy and happy household. Through the future bride and groom class, integrated education about reproductive health, prevention of violence against women and children, and women's empowerment, it is hoped that it can prepare brides and grooms to become harmonious, responsible couples, and able to protect reproductive rights and family welfare.

Future bride and groom classes have been proven to be effective in increasing the knowledge and awareness of prospective brides and grooms about reproductive health. This includes information about the reproductive system, sexual health, pregnancy and childbirth, and the importance of premarital examinations. A better understanding of reproductive health can help young couples plan a healthy pregnancy, prevent sexually transmitted diseases, and maintain their overall reproductive health. Integrating education about preventing violence against women and children into future bride and groom classes is an important step toward building a generation free from violence. Through

this class, prospective brides and grooms can learn about various forms of violence, understand the root of the problem, and learn steps to prevent and deal with it. Thus, it is hoped that a harmonious and loving family can be created, where women and children feel safe and respected.¹⁰ Future bride and groom classes can also be a platform to encourage women's empowerment. Equipping prospective brides with knowledge and skills about their rights, gender equality, and their roles in the family and society, it is hoped that it can increase their self-confidence and independence. This can contribute to the creation of an equal and just family, where women have the same voice and opportunity to develop.¹¹.



Figure 1. Activities (Future bride and groom)

The class for prospective brides and grooms integrated with education on reproductive health, prevention of violence against women and children, and women's

empowerment is a useful and strategic program to prepare the younger generation to build a healthy, happy, and violence-free household. The implementation of this program consistently and sustainably is expected to contribute to reducing the number of early marriages, improving reproductive health, and creating a more just and equal society.

The problem of early marriage is still a major challenge in Indonesia. Although the government has made various efforts to reduce this practice, the obstacles faced are still very complex. The basis of the legislation designed to address this problem is Law Number 16 of 2019 which sets a minimum age limit for marriage. This study aims to determine the role of the Religious Affairs Office (KUA) in reducing the prevalence of early marriage in Sidowayah Village and measure the effectiveness of the implementation of Law Number 16 of 2019. In addition, this study aims to explore the broader implications of this law on social norms and the potential need for further policy refinement to ensure the welfare of minors and the preservation of their rights to education and personal development.

The Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) plays a key role in initiatives aimed at curbing early marriage through a series of community outreach and education programs. A key insight gained from this

study is the proactive involvement of the KUA in Sidowayah Village in disseminating information about the dangers of early marriage and the provisions contained in Law Number 16 of 2019. The initiative includes community engagement, group dialogues, and the use of local media to broadcast relevant information. Through these outreach activities, the KUA provides the community with an understanding of the health, social, and economic risks posed by early marriage. For example, from a health perspective, early marriage increases the risk of maternal and infant mortality, stunted growth, and pregnancy-related complications. From an educational perspective, it often hinders the educational journey of children, especially girls, thereby reducing their prospects for employment. In the long term, this can exacerbate family poverty and reinforce the cycle of impoverishment and social disadvantage.

Although the role of the KUA in this socialization and education is quite significant, research shows that these efforts still need to be strengthened. One of the main challenges faced is cultural resistance among the community who still consider early marriage as an accepted social norm. Therefore, increasing public awareness about the importance of complying with Law No. 16 of 2019 and the negative impacts of early marriage is a very important

step. Law No. 16 of 2019 is a progressive step taken by the Indonesian government to reduce early marriage by raising the minimum age of marriage for women from 16 to 19 years. This study found that the implementation of this law showed positive results, but there are still several challenges that need to be overcome.

One of the positive impacts of the implementation of Law No. 16 of 2019 is a decrease in the number of early marriages in several regions. Data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) shows a decrease in the number of child marriages in several provinces since this law was enacted. In addition, counseling programs carried out by the KUA and other related institutions have succeeded in increasing public awareness of the dangers of early marriage and the importance of complying with applicable legal provisions. However, the implementation of this law still faces several challenges. One of the main challenges is the high number of applications for early marriage dispensation submitted to religious courts. In 2022 alone, religious courts received 55,000 applications for early marriage dispensation, which is double the number of applications the previous year. This shows that despite increased awareness, many families are still trying to marry off their children under the specified age.

Another challenge is cultural resistance in some areas. In Sidowayah Village, for example, there are still social norms that support early marriage. Changes in social norms that support early marriage need to be carried out through more intensive advocacy and education. This includes an approach that involves community and religious leaders to help change existing perceptions and norms. To overcome the existing challenges, several efforts need to be strengthened. First, socialization and education regarding the dangers of early marriage and the provisions of Law No. 16 of 2019 need to be increased. The KUA, together with other government institutions, needs to carry out more intensive and comprehensive counseling programs, covering all levels of society. In addition, the use of local and digital media can also be utilized to reach more people and disseminate information more effectively. Second, law enforcement against violations of underage marriage needs to be strengthened and made consistent. The government needs to ensure that religious courts do not easily grant dispensations for early marriage and that all dispensation requests are evaluated very strictly. In addition, sanctions against parties who violate the provisions of this law must be enforced firmly to provide a deterrent effect.

Third, access to education and economic opportunities for women needs to be improved to address poverty and gender inequality that are driving factors for early marriage. The government and related institutions need to ensure that children, especially girls, have adequate access to education and economic opportunities. Scholarship programs, skills training, and economic empowerment for women need to be expanded to create an environment that supports women to continue their education and improve their welfare. Fourth, changes in social norms that support early marriage need to be done through advocacy and education involving all elements of society. Community and religious leaders, who have great influence in their communities, need to be involved in this effort. Through a collaborative approach, it is hoped that there will be changes in attitudes and behavior of society towards early marriage.

The findings of this study highlight the important contribution of the Religious Affairs Office (KUA) in efforts to mitigate early marriage through community engagement and education campaigns. The enactment of Law Number 16 of 2019 has shown positive impacts, with a significant decrease in cases of early marriage in various jurisdictions and increased public awareness of the risks inherent in such practices.

However, the path forward is not without obstacles. Cultural inflexibility and the increasing number of requests for exceptions to early marriage, some of which have been granted by the courts, present significant challenges. To increase the impact of these initiatives, there is an urgent need to improve educational outreach and strategies, stricter law enforcement, expand educational opportunities and economic prospects for women, and make concerted efforts to change social customs that condone early marriage. Through strong partnerships between government agencies, relevant institutions, and the wider community, there is an optimistic view that the number of early marriages in Indonesia can be further reduced, paving the way for a brighter future for the younger generation.

This study underlines the important role of the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) in curbing early marriage through its initiatives in community engagement and education programs. The enactment of Law Number 16 of 2019, which amends the 1974 Marriage Law, has yielded encouraging results, manifested in the decline in early marriage rates in various regions and increased public awareness of the dangers associated with early marriage. However, despite the significant progress that has been made, there are still obstacles. A significant obstacle is the deep-rooted

cultural resistance in certain communities that still view early marriage as a permissible societal practice. This is exacerbated by the many requests for exceptions to early marriage that have been submitted and, unfortunately, granted by judicial authorities in some cases.

To overcome this challenge, several steps need to be taken. First, increasing socialization and education is essential. The KUA together with related institutions needs to conduct more campaigns targeting areas with high rates of early marriage. These campaigns must be designed in such a way that they can reach all levels of society, including parents, religious leaders, and youth. The use of social media and other digital platforms can also be an effective tool in conveying important messages about the dangers of early marriage. Second, more consistent law enforcement must be implemented. Authorities need to ensure that the rules regarding the minimum age for marriage are strictly enforced. Courts must be more selective in granting dispensations for early marriage and ensure that the request is truly based on very urgent reasons and not only because of social or economic pressure.

Third, increasing access to education and economic opportunities for women is also essential. Education is one of the best ways to prevent children from early

marriage. Programs that ensure that girls stay in school and receive a decent education need to be expanded and well-supported. In addition, providing better economic opportunities for women will help them become more independent and less dependent on marriage as a way out of poverty. Fourth, changes in social norms that support early marriage must be attempted. This is a challenge that requires a long-term approach and collaboration between various parties. The government, non-governmental organizations, communities, and religious leaders must work together to change the public's view of early marriage. Education on children's rights and gender equality needs to be improved to change public perception.

With strong collaboration between the government, related institutions, and the community, it is hoped that the number of early marriages in Indonesia can continue to decline. This will provide a better future for the younger generation, allowing them to pursue higher education, develop their potential, and contribute more significantly to national development. This joint effort will create a healthier and fairer society, where every child has the opportunity to grow and develop according to their best potential without being limited by detrimental practices such as early marriage.

Research on prospective brides and grooms classes provides an interesting opportunity to examine their long-term impact on reproductive health, violence prevention, and women's empowerment. This could be done by tracking future bride and groom participants sometime after they have joined the program and measuring changes in their knowledge, behavior, and well-being. In this way, we can understand the effectiveness of the future bride and groom program in the long term and identify areas that need to be strengthened.

In addition, it is important to develop more effective future bride and groom class models that are tailored to different cultural needs and contexts. This can involve the active participation of various stakeholders, such as local governments, civil society organizations, and religious and traditional leaders. An effective future bride and groom class model must be relevant to local culture and traditions, and easily accessible and understood by all prospective brides and grooms. Promotion and advocacy are also needed to increase access to and participation in future bride and groom classes. This can be done through various media, such as public education campaigns, collaboration with educational and health institutions, and providing incentives for participants. By increasing participation, we can ensure that

future bride and groom programs reach more prospective brides and provide maximum benefits for them and their families. By continuing to develop and strengthen future bride and groom class programs, and conducting research to measure their long-term impact, we can together build a brighter future for young people and families in Indonesia. A future where women and children live in healthy, happy families free from violence, and where they have the opportunity to thrive and reach their full potential.

Conclusion

The role of the KUA in reducing early marriage in Sidowayah Village is quite significant, especially through socialization and community education. The implementation of Law No. 16 of 2019 has had a positive impact although it still faces several obstacles. Collaborative efforts are needed between the KUA, local government, and the community to overcome these challenges and strengthen the implementation of this policy. This study aims to identify the role of the KUA in reducing early marriage in Sidowayah Village and evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of Law No. 16 of 2019. The results of the study indicate that the KUA in Sidowayah Village has played an active role in socialization and education regarding the dangers of early marriage and the provisions

of Law No. 16 of 2019. These efforts have had a positive impact, although there are still several obstacles such as lack of public awareness and local cultural resistance.

Law No. 16 of 2019 has provided a stronger legal basis for protecting children from the risks of early marriage. However, to achieve significant changes in reducing the prevalence of early marriage, collaborative efforts are needed between the KUA, local governments, and the community to overcome these challenges and strengthen the implementation of this policy. This study also found that counseling programs on the dangers of underage marriage and the risks it causes for men and women have had a positive impact. The counseling not only increased awareness of children's rights and the importance of education but also helped change public perceptions of the practice of early marriage.

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