

Global Initiatives for The Prevention of Child Marriage: A Case Study of Girls Not Brides in Indonesia

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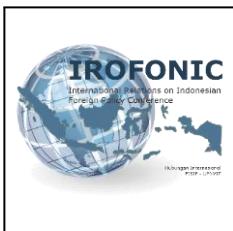
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ABSTRACT

Child marriage remains a pressing human rights violation in many regions of Indonesia. According to the Central Statistics Agency (BPS, 2024), 5.9% of Indonesian women aged 20–24 were married before turning 18. This practice has wide-ranging consequences, particularly for girls, as it restricts access to education, heightens reproductive health risks, increases exposure to domestic violence, and sustains intergenerational poverty. Although the Indonesian government revised Marriage Law No. 1 of 1974 through Law No. 16 of 2019 to raise the legal minimum marriage age to 19, implementation continues to face serious socio-cultural and structural barriers, including deeply rooted social norms and persistent poverty. This study examines the strategies and effectiveness of global initiatives promoted by Girls Not Brides (GNB) in supporting child marriage prevention in Indonesia. Employing a literature review method, the research synthesizes evidence from scholarly publications, reports by international organizations, and documents from civil society groups. The findings demonstrate that GNB advances interventions through community-based engagement, comprehensive sexuality education, policy advocacy, and active youth participation as change agents. The effectiveness of these strategies depends on strong partnerships between global and local organizations, sensitivity to cultural values, and active involvement of government and community leaders. Based on the analysis, the study recommends reinforcing the integration of normative approaches that focus on reshaping cultural and social attitudes with structural approaches that strengthen legal frameworks and address economic inequalities. Such integration is essential to developing child marriage prevention policies in Indonesia that are sustainable, inclusive, and culturally responsive.

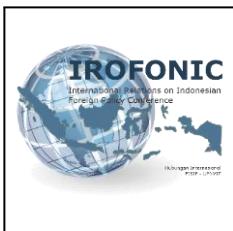
Keywords: *child marriage, human rights, girls not brides, policy advocacy, Indonesia*



INTRODUCTION

Child marriage is a form of human rights violation that remains a significant issue in Indonesia. According to the Central Statistics Agency (2024), around 5.9% of Indonesian women aged 20–24 years were married before the age of 18 (BPS, 2024; UNICEF Indonesia, 2021). This figure places Indonesia among the countries with the highest rates of child marriage in the world (Yoshida et al., 2022). This shows that the problem of child marriage is not only a legal matter but is also influenced by various complex social, cultural, and economic factors. Therefore, prevention efforts require not only policy changes but also comprehensive and collaborative approaches from multiple sectors. The practice of child marriage broadly affects the lives of women and children. For example, it limits access to education, increases reproductive health risks, and raises the likelihood of domestic violence (Setiawan, 2024). Girls who marry early are three times more likely to drop out of school and experience risky pregnancies compared to those who marry as adults (UNICEF, 2021). This reinforces the intergenerational cycle of poverty and hinders the development of quality human resources. Thus, preventing child marriage is a crucial step toward accelerating the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially in education, gender equality, and poverty reduction.

The Indonesian government has shown commitment through the amendment of Marriage Law No. 1 of 1974 to Law No. 16 of 2019. This amendment sets the minimum marriage age at 19 years for both men and women (KemenPPPA, 2020). However, implementation still faces challenges such as a high number of marriage dispensation cases and insufficient monitoring at the regional level (Supreme Court of Indonesia, 2021; National Commission on Violence Against Women, 2022). Many local communities still maintain cultural and religious norms that support child marriage as a way to alleviate poverty or maintain family honor. Therefore, it is important to involve local communities and leaders in every policy effort. Without changing societal mindsets, policies alone will struggle to make a real impact.



One key actor addressing this issue is Girls Not Brides (GNB), an international coalition of more than 1,500 civil society organizations from over 100 countries, including Indonesia (Girls Not Brides, 2023). GNB works to eliminate child marriage through community engagement, comprehensive sexuality education, policy advocacy, and youth involvement as change agents. In Indonesia, GNB collaborates with local organizations such as Plan Indonesia, Women's Health Foundation, and Rutgers Indonesia to develop prevention strategies tailored to local culture and contexts (Rutgers, 2020). This study aims to assess the effectiveness of GNB's approach in Indonesia, as well as to identify the challenges and opportunities of applying global strategies locally. It is hoped that this article will provide input for better and more inclusive policies to prevent child marriage in Indonesia.

METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with the literature review method as the primary technique for data collection. The use of literature review was chosen because it allows the researcher to read, understand, and analyze in depth various relevant secondary sources, such as scholarly journal articles, international institutional reports, policy documents, and publications from civil society organizations addressing the issue of child marriage. The main sources of data come from publications issued between 2015 and 2025, including both reputable national and international journals. Additional data were obtained from reports by Girls Not Brides (GNB), UNICEF, and independent research institutions. Data analysis was conducted using content analysis to identify global intervention patterns and GNB's strategies within the Indonesian context. The analysis focused on four key aspects: (1) policy advocacy, (2) reproductive health education, (3) youth empowerment, and (4) local-global partnerships.

Literature selection followed specific criteria. Inclusion criteria consisted of: (1) direct relevance to the issue of child marriage in Indonesia; (2) reference to or involvement of Girls Not Brides as an actor; and (3) contribution to the understanding of child marriage prevention strategies at both global and local levels. Meanwhile, exclusion criteria included sources without publication dates, lacking credible institutional affiliation, or not undergoing a peer-review process. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation, by comparing and confirming information across different publications and examining the contextual background of each source. The results of the analysis are presented in descriptive narrative form to provide a comprehensive overview of how Girls Not Brides' approaches contribute to driving social change and policy reforms in preventing child marriage in Indonesia. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation and contextual clarification of content interpretation. The analysis results were then compiled narratively to provide a comprehensive overview of the effectiveness of the Girls Not Brides approach in promoting social and policy change related to child marriage prevention in Indonesia.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Prevalence and Context of Child Marriage in Indonesia

Child marriage continues to pose a significant challenge that necessitates concerted attention from multiple sectors in Indonesia. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics (2024), approximately 5.9% of women aged 20 to 24 had entered into marriage before the age of 18 (BPS, 2024). Although this figure indicates a decline compared to previous years, the prevalence of child marriage remains considerably high, particularly in specific regions such as East Nusa Tenggara, South Sulawesi, and Papua, where the rates surpass the national average (UNICEF Indonesia, 2021). This condition illustrates persistent regional disparities shaped by a combination of poverty, limited educational attainment, and entrenched social norms that perpetuate early marriage practices.

A critical determinant of this phenomenon is restricted access to education, especially in rural areas where schools are geographically distant, the cost of education remains relatively burdensome, and cultural perceptions continue to regard girls' education as less of a priority compared to that of boys (Ismawati, 2024). Moreover, economic vulnerability significantly influences parental decisions to marry off their daughters at an early age as a perceived strategy to reduce household financial burdens (Hikmah, 2019). The long-term implications extend beyond educational discontinuation, contributing to heightened stunting prevalence and imposing additional strain on public health systems, thereby hindering the advancement of human capital development at the national level (Wafi, Atika, & Baidlowi, 2023). Taken together, these dynamics underscore that child marriage is not merely a legal concern but rather a multidimensional issue shaped by interrelated economic, cultural, and educational factors. Accordingly, addressing the persistence of child marriage necessitates a holistic and collaborative approach that actively engages diverse stakeholders.

Global Strategy of Girls Not Brides (GNB) in Child Marriage Prevention

Girls Not Brides (GNB), as a global organization, plays a pivotal role in addressing child marriage through multifaceted approaches. GNB emphasizes the importance of engaging local communities—including families, community leaders, religious authorities, and youth—in order to foster greater awareness of the detrimental impacts of early marriage (Girls Not Brides, 2023). This approach creates spaces for intergenerational dialogue and encourages the acceptance of new social norms that reject the practice of child marriage.

In addition, GNB promotes the provision of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) to enhance knowledge of pregnancy, sexual and reproductive health, as well as the

importance of delaying marriage to pursue higher education and improved life opportunities. By adapting CSE programs to local community contexts, GNB equips adolescents with critical perspectives toward child marriage norms and enables them to envision broader life trajectories (Arini, 2023). Furthermore, GNB actively encourages youth participation as agents of change through leadership training initiatives and social media campaigns. The involvement of young people in educating their peers and wider communities has proven highly effective in raising awareness of the importance of delaying marriage. Through such strategies, GNB has succeeded in fostering a grassroots movement against child marriage.

Implementation and Adaptation of GNB Programs in Indonesia

In Indonesia, Girls Not Brides (GNB) collaborates with a number of local organizations such as Rumah KitaB, Plan Indonesia, Yayasan Kesehatan Perempuan, and the 18+ Coalition to design programs that align with cultural values and local contexts. A case study conducted in Lombok and East Nusa Tenggara revealed that campaigns involving community and religious leaders reduced the intention to marry underage by approximately 15–20% over the past five years (Fibrianti, 2021). These programs emphasize communication strategies that respect local and religious values in order to minimize resistance. For instance, religious sermons delivered by faith leaders, supported by GNB and its partners, successfully shifted public perceptions of child marriage from being a perceived social obligation to being understood as a violation of children's rights (Rutgers Indonesia, 2020). Nevertheless, program implementation continues to face substantial challenges, particularly in reaching remote areas where access to education and healthcare remains severely limited. These difficulties are further compounded by insufficient funding allocations from local governments and reliance on external financial support. Consequently, there is a pressing need to strengthen the institutional capacity of local organizations and diversify funding sources to ensure the sustainability and broader outreach of such initiatives.

Cultural and Structural Challenges in Child Marriage Prevention

Social and cultural values that perpetuate early marriage remain a major challenge, one that cannot be effectively addressed through legal instruments alone. According to research by the National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan, 2022), in many communities child marriage is perceived as a solution to poverty, a means of safeguarding family reputation, and a way to meet social expectations. Such perspectives often generate pressure and stigma for young women who choose not to marry at an early age.

On the other hand, regulations such as Law No. 16 of 2019, which raised the

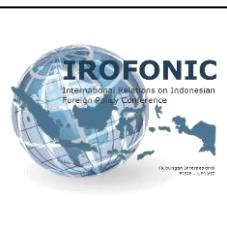
minimum legal age of marriage to 19, have yet to yield satisfactory outcomes. This is largely due to the frequent granting of marriage dispensations by religious courts, often without adequate consideration of children's rights (Supreme Court of the Republic of Indonesia, 2021). This situation reflects not only a lack of institutional coordination but also limited awareness among law enforcement and judicial actors regarding the adverse consequences of child marriage. From the author's perspective, sustainable solutions must encompass broader social transformation through intergenerational dialogue, value-based education, and the comprehensive empowerment of women. Advocacy programs that actively engage community leaders, the media, and digital campaigns can accelerate normative shifts within communities where child marriage practices remain deeply entrenched.

Policy Synergy and Community Approach: Key to Success

The analysis indicates that preventing child marriage in Indonesia requires strong collaboration between formal policy frameworks and culturally grounded community-based approaches. Girls Not Brides (GNB) serves as a bridge between global and local levels by supporting policy advocacy and strengthening the capacity of civil society organizations (Girls Not Brides, 2023). For instance, the Youth Ambassadors initiative launched by GNB and its partners engages young people as agents of change. They are not only disseminating information on prevention but also actively participating in community-level decision-making processes (Devinta, 2022). Through this approach, children and adolescents are positioned as active contributors to social transformation rather than passive recipients of externally imposed policies. Government support, particularly through improved regulatory frameworks and stronger law enforcement, remains crucial to ensuring effective child protection. However, without community participation that acknowledges and integrates local values, the implementation of such policies is likely to encounter significant challenges. The author concludes that strengthening cross-sectoral collaboration and engaging diverse stakeholders represents a key strategy in building sustainable and inclusive efforts to prevent child marriage in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

Child marriage remains a serious issue in Indonesia, requiring collaboration between the government, communities, and organizations such as Girls Not Brides (GNB). Research highlights that GNB's interventions—through community-based approaches, comprehensive sexuality education, youth empowerment, and policy advocacy—have generated positive outcomes in reducing child marriage rates, particularly when adapted to local cultural contexts. Nevertheless, progress continues to be hindered by deeply embedded social norms and structural factors that perpetuate early marriage practices. Therefore, the implementation of robust legal frameworks alongside inclusive strategies for social transformation is essential in advancing the prevention of child marriage. Strengthening cross-sectoral collaboration and enhancing the capacity of local organizations are critical to ensuring that programs reach all segments of society, including those in remote areas. With a holistic and adaptable approach, Indonesia has the potential to accelerate efforts toward eliminating child marriage and securing a better future for young women.



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