

Early Marriage in Indonesia:  
Exploring the Lived Experiences of Families of Early Marriage Women

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## **Dedication**

To all courageous women who defend and fight for their lives. And to any human beings who stood by their sides.

## Abstract

Early marriage prevalence in Indonesia is the second highest in Southeast Asia. Despite the fact that married at an early age can bring a lot of disadvantages to women, it still emerges in some areas in Indonesia, especially in rural areas. The aim of this study is to explore the meaning of marriage in the eyes of women who were married at an early age. The research was conducted in Sumbermalang, Situbondo, East Java, Indonesia, focusing on the Madurese ethnic community. Phenomenological approach was used to explore the lived experiences of early married Madurese women. Thirty Madurese women, aged 18-45, participated in a 30-60 minutes semi-structured interview in Indonesian national language. The data were transcribed and analyzed based on the content analysis technique. The results showed that young women decide to get married for reasons such as love, arranged married, economic benefits, and community pressure. Some social norms and values reported include sexual purity, the importance of marriage, and gender inequality. These social norms and values tend to make early marriage practice exist through generations. Lastly, the study found that women who married early tend to drop out from school, bear children early, experience mood swings, and force to mature quickly. Some implications and future research directions are also discussed.

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## Introductions

Growing up in a rural area in Indonesia made me more vulnerable to marry at an early age. Some of my neighborhood friends had already been married since they finished primary school, and they were not even 17 years old yet. I used to spend a lot of time together with them during my childhood. We shared our dreams and our plans for the future together. I remember they told me that they wanted to be a nurse, teacher, or midwife when they grew up. When I was 15 years old, my parents sent me to one of the best schools outside of my town, and I barely talked to them anymore. I continued to live my dreams and I thought all my friends were doing the same too. However, not long after we finished middle school, I heard that some of them had dropped out of school and worked as laborers (or in manufacturing jobs), and others decided to get married very early. None of them had achieved their dreams, except me because I have better access to quality, formal education. If my parents were not able to afford to send me to that school, I would have been married 10 years ago just like my childhood friends.

I am not proud of this “given” privilege, but I am curious how a single step in our lives could have made a huge contrast. We share the same culture, we live in the same neighborhood, some of us are related by blood and even share the same ancestors, and our parents were childhood friends and they came from the same socio-economic status; yet we have a completely different life trajectory. In my family, my great grandparents did not have any access to proper education, and they lived in a very poor household. However, they always told my grandparents to pursue higher education to live a better life, no matter what it takes. They did not want their offspring to live an impoverished life as they did. That was the turning point when my family became aware of the importance

of education. My grandparents started to delay their marriage and got a better job as their parents' wishes. As time went by, my grandparents passed down this value of "a better life" to my parents, and this family value has become a family legacy in my family.

Since I was a child, my mother always told me that I should be an independent woman even after marriage. "Marry if you are ready, not if you are lonely or to solve your problems," said my mother. Since then, I see marriage as a life challenge that can only be held by whoever is independent and well-prepared for life. Apparently, it was one of our family values that has been passed through the generations from my great-grandparents. I shared the same value with my siblings and cousins. We were the only teenagers in our neighborhood that had the privilege to go to college and get jobs afterwards before thinking about getting married. Understanding my family history and privilege helps me to develop my thoughts on how I perceive about and make meaning out of early marriage in my community.

Although I only saw how marriage became such a barrier for my friends to pursue higher education and complicate them to get a good job at first, now I understand that early marriage is not unique to my friends. My friends are part of a larger trend in my community. For example, Indonesia is part of the top countries with the highest numbers of child marriage, ranking seventh globally. In 2012, 1,348,886 girls married before the age of 18. In other words, about 3,695 girls married per day or about one in four Indonesian girls were child brides. Of these girls, 292,663 married before the age of 16 and 110,198 before the age of 15 (BPS, 2016).

More importantly, what is happening in Indonesia is also occurring elsewhere. For instance, in 2012 the United Nations Population Fund estimated that there were 14.2

million girls married before the age of 18 worldwide on an annual basis (United Nations Population Fund, 2012). Over 700 million women alive today were once child brides, and one in three of these girls married before the age of 15. Early marriage can impact 150 million girls in the world, particularly girls living in South Asia and Sub Saharan Africa, followed by East Asia and Pacific Region (McDougal et al., 2018).

On the average, studies show significant relational problems, health, and educational risks associated with early marriage. Rachel Kidman (2017) conducted a study with 39,877 girls and found that girls who married early tend to experience abuse and domestic violence. Cassandra Gibbs and associates found that early marriage is positively related to pregnancy-related deaths (Gibbs, Wendt, Peters, & Hogue, 2012). Gordon Brown (2012) studied a group of girls aged 15 to 19 and found that married girls tend to perform poorer in school, drop out of school before finishing high school, and face more barriers to employment. Consequently, women who got married early were more likely to end up having children (Delprato & Akyeampong, 2017) and having children before graduating from high school. Research shows that having children early is a major barrier to continue education and access to job opportunities (Bennett, 2014).

In those studies (Bennett, 2014; Delprato & Akyeampong, 2017; Gibbs, Wendt, Peters, & Hogue, 2012; Kidman, 2017), young women have been found to be more vulnerable to the damaging outcomes of early marriage than their husbands. Partly, it is because young women rarely have the power to negotiate in their marriage, including the decision making prior to the marriage and any other decisions within their marriages (McDougal et al., 2018). For example, some girls were being forced to get married without any input or being involved in arranged marriage without having a choice

(Bennett, 2014; Delprato & Akyeampong, 2017; Efevbera, Bhabha, Farmer, & Fink, 2017; Gage, 2013; Knox, 2017; Maertens, 2013; McDougal et al., 2018). Research suggests that arranged marriage has been found to correlate with having no decision-making power for girls (Knox, 2017; Sabbe et al., 2015).

This inequality, that women do not have their own voice, reflects women's position in society, specifically within the family. Rumble et al. (2018) states that early marriage in Indonesia could be linked to unequal gender norms. Specifically, they provide some evidence to link higher rates of early marriage to geographical areas or countries that adhere to unequal gender norms; norms that treat women as a second-class citizen. Various studies have shown this relationship in some geographical areas that have a high concentration of ethnic groups, such as Sulawesi (Erfina, Widyawati, Mckenna, & Reisenhofer, 2019), Kalimantan or Borneo (Laily, Kania, Ilmi, & Marlinae, 2018), Lombok (Bennett, 2019), Sundanese (Grijns & Horii, 2018), and Madurese (Muhith, Fardiansyah, & Saputra, 2018).

Although various studies have initiated to understand early marriage in Indonesia (Bennett, 2014; Erfina et al., 2019; Grijns & Horii, 2018; Indriyati & Handayani, 2018; Laily et al., 2018; Muhith, Fardiansyah, & Saputra, 2018; Rumble et al., 2018), most of the research tends to focus on factors that account for early marriages, including culture, religion, education, poverty, geographical location, and parental circumstances (Rumble et al., 2018), as well as the outcomes that might emerge after or during marriage. To date, there is limited research conducted to examine the lived experiences of women who married early, especially focusing on the meaning of marriage in the context of the Madurese ethnic group, an ethnic group in Indonesia that has the highest prevalence rates

of early marriage (Jones, 2001). Therefore, the objective of this study was to understand how Madurese women who married early constructed meanings around the institution of marriage based on their unique lived experiences. To address this objective, the following research questions were explored.

1. Why do young Madurese women get married so early?
2. How do Madurese women make meanings out of their early marriage?
3. What are the lived experiences of Madurese women in regard to the consequences of early marriage?

## **Literature Review**

### **The Term Child Marriage or Early Marriage**

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) defines a child as anyone under the age of 18 years (Sabbe et al., 2015), implying that every marriage of anyone before reaching that age can be categorized as child marriage. Meanwhile, the terms early marriage seems ambiguous because not all writers stated clearly how early is considered early marriage. Considering an appropriate age for marriage, each culture and country has its own standard in determining a minimum age for marriage. For instance, in Indonesia the minimum age of legal marriage is 16 and 19 years for women and men respectively (Rumble et al., 2018). In Iran, girls aged 13 years old are allowed to get married, and those younger than 13 can be allowed to marry with parental consent (Hajihassani & Sim, 2018).

Some cultures and religions, including Islam, do not set any minimum age to get married (Segal-Engelchin et al., 2016). Although UNICEF has determined that early

marriage is a marriage before the age of 18 (Erulkar, 2013), it is important for research studies to explain explicitly the age limit that defines early marriage and add background information so that the reader can fully understand the context of the marriage. Only a few articles explicitly define early marriage as involving one or both actors under 18 years old (Erulkar, 2013; Hejazziey, 2016; Sabbe et al., 2015; Segal-Engelchin, Huss, & Massry, 2016).

In Indonesia, age is just a number and does not identify a person's maturity (Jones, 2001). As long as the young person is seen to be a "grown up" or enters into puberty, s/he is deemed eligible to get married. In some cases, young people do not know how old they are because of the lack of documentation such as birth certificates. Hence, Indonesians tend to use the term "earlier (*dini*) or later (*nanti*)" in case of getting married. For example, in East Lombok, when being asked about their age at marriage, women frequently said how many menstruations they had experienced before they married. The problem with this is that women vary considerably in their age at menarche (Jones, 2001).

Considering these factors, this study used the term "early marriage" instead of child-marriage to refer to marriages where one of the partners or both of them are younger than 18 years old when they got married. Specifically, this study focused on early marriages where the bride was under the age of 18 at her first marriage.

### **Cultures, Value and Social Norms Related to Marriage**

One of the key concerns of the 1974 Marriage Law was to prevent excessively young marriages by setting a minimum age at marriage of 16 for females. However, this provision was strongly opposed by many Muslim groups on the ground that the Koran

does not set any such lower limit for the age at marriage. Marriage law has not been conspicuously successful in preventing early marriage at that moment (Jones, 2001). However, apparently 16 was not an ideal age to be married since UNICEF declares that any marriages that involve people under 18-year-old is considered as early marriage. Moreover, according to Article 7 of the 1974 Marriage Law in Indonesia, although the minimum age for marriage is 16 and 19 for woman and man respectively with parental consent (Stang, 2011), the law provides dispensation or opportunities for the parents to marry their children legally at a younger age, even without their consent. The recent amendment of Indonesia's Marriage Laws (1974) in 2019 has raised the minimum age that girls can be married with parental permission from 16 to 19 years to be in line with age limit for boys. Now, the age of marriage for both women and men without parental permission is 21 (UNICEF, 2019). Although this amendment attempts to bring awareness towards early marriage, it could lead to some confusion since in some communities early marriage is part of their culture.

Since marriage is so much part of a culture, some communities continue to practice their traditions, including when to get married and to whom. As such, girls living in the rural areas are 1.5 times more likely to marry before the age of 18 compared to those who live in urban areas (Rumble et al., 2018). Parents in low-income rural areas tend to demand their children to marry early before the age of 18 (Rafidah, Emilia, & Wahyuni, 2009). As such, daughters are socialized and expected to “uphold the family name” by controlling their sexual behavior until marriage (Smith-Hefner, 2005), and parents tend to marry their daughters in early age to avoid pre-marital sex.

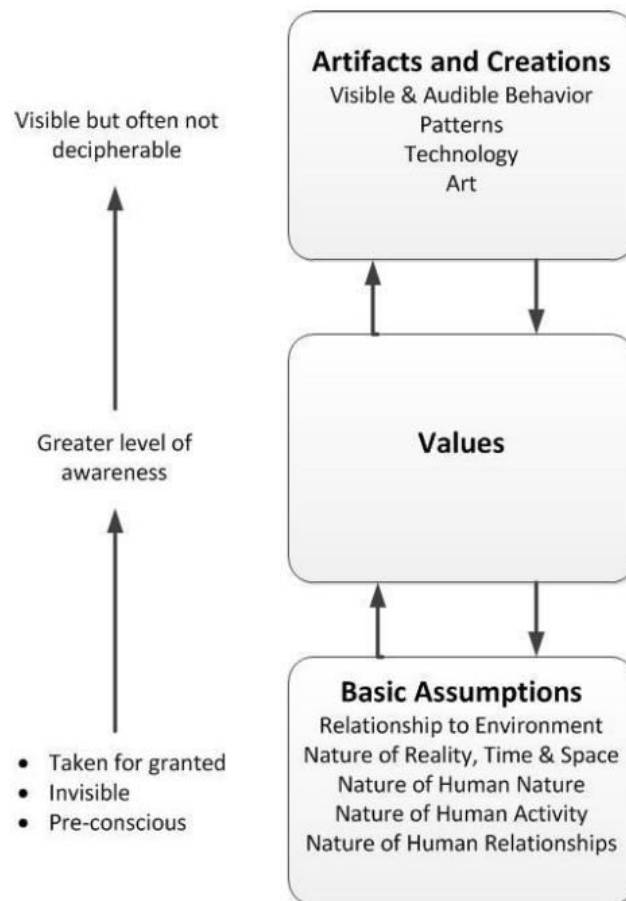


Seeing marriage as a cultural product, it is important to discuss marriage practices in Indonesia from multiple cultural levels as proposed by Spencer-Oatey (2012) (see Figure 1). According to Spencer-Oatey, the first category is observable artifacts, or behaviors and other tangible materials that can be observed directly, such as the physical layout, the dress code, the manner in which people address each other, the smell and feel of the place, its emotional intensity, and other phenomena. In marriage, observable artifacts include the ceremony of marriage, the characteristics of a good wife or husband, and the appropriate age to get married in the culture. For instance, in Madurese community it is common to arrange children's marriage even before they are born (Bawono, Suminar, & Hendriani, 2019).

The deeper level of culture is value. Values are standards (what is good or bad, right or wrong) or the reasons behind the behavior or observable artifacts. For example, Madurese people tend to get married at an early age because being single until a certain age without having any spouse is considered a bad luck or inappropriate way of life (Bawono & Suryanto, 2019). In other words, the Madurese standard for young women is to get married early before the age of 18. In this case, they value marriage as an important trajectory in life and early marriage is beneficial since couples can be integrated into the community and contribute to the larger good.

Lastly, the most fundamental level of any culture includes the culture's underlying assumptions or philosophies or the things that are so much part of the culture that people usually take for granted. These taking-for-granted assumptions are powerful because they are less debatable. These assumptions tend to be unconscious but have significant influences on how members of the community perceive, think, feel, and act.

As an example, husbands are supposed to be the family's breadwinner, girls who never get married are virgin and pure, and being a wife means a woman should obey her husband.



*Figure 1: The Levels of Culture and Their Interactions (Spencer-Oatey, 2012, p.4)*

## **The Meaning of Marriage in Indonesia**

The Marriage Law 1974, the basic or foundation of any marriage law in Indonesia, determines a marriage as “a physical and mental bonding between a man and a woman as a husband and wife with the purpose to build a family (household) that is happy and eternal based on the Belief in the One and Only God” (The Marriage Law 1974, article 1). This definition implies that a marriage is a legalization of relationship of two opposite sex individuals to achieve happiness for the longest time. Supporting the definition, marriage, according to the Indonesian National Socio-economic Survey (SUSENAS), is a person who has a wife (for men) or husband (for women), either living together or apart. Including those who married legally valid (culture, religion, state and so on), those who live together and are considered by the surrounding community as husband and wife (BPS, 2018). Both of these definitions emphasize the relationship of two people and live together as a couple, with the culture, religion, and state’s recognition.

Although the Marriage law of 1974 aims to reduce early marriage by stating the minimum legal age to be married and promoting women as an autonomous legal subject who can file for divorce, this law also promotes women as “legally subordinate to men” (O’Shaughnessy, 2009, p. 33) by clearly dividing the role of husband and wife in the marriage. According to the Marriage Law of 1974, husband is the head of the household and the wife is the manager of the household (article 31, paragraph 3). Moreover, the husband is obliged to protect his wife and provide everything needed for the household according to his ability, and the wife must manage the household affairs very well.

Marriage and its associated regulations have often been part of the state's plans to shape society. Marriage can be a vehicle for the Indonesian government's agenda to promote any forms of marriage to domesticate women (Platt, 2017). The marriage laws are the Indonesian ideals of modernity, and in a modern era, the law states that the nuclear family is the basis unit of the nation. Therefore, Indonesian government believes that it is important to regulate how the household should be run. Through the National Population and Family Planning Board (BKKBN), governments promote the image of the nuclear family that includes two parents and two children and the roles of each individual in the family.

On the other hand, as the most-populous Muslim country in the world, Islam has a huge influence and contribution to the way society views and practices marriage. Coupled with the Marriage Law of 1974 that advocates for certain gender ideologies is the religious belief, especially a concept called *Kodrat*. *Kodrat* is belief that the husband and wife must complement each other as God had intended where the husband shall be the leader and the financial provider of the family and the wife shall be the one who responsible for reproduction and the domestic sphere (Utomo, 2014). In the urban contemporary context, the male breadwinner marriage model has been reshaped to accommodate emerging dual-earner ideals with the husband as the main breadwinner and the wife as a secondary earner.

Platt (2017) divided the law regarding marriage in Indonesian community into the government's marriage law and the community-based law including religion and cultural norms. In some communities, including the Madurese ethnic group, community-based law is still the most resourceful law to rely on. Individuals in these communities tend to

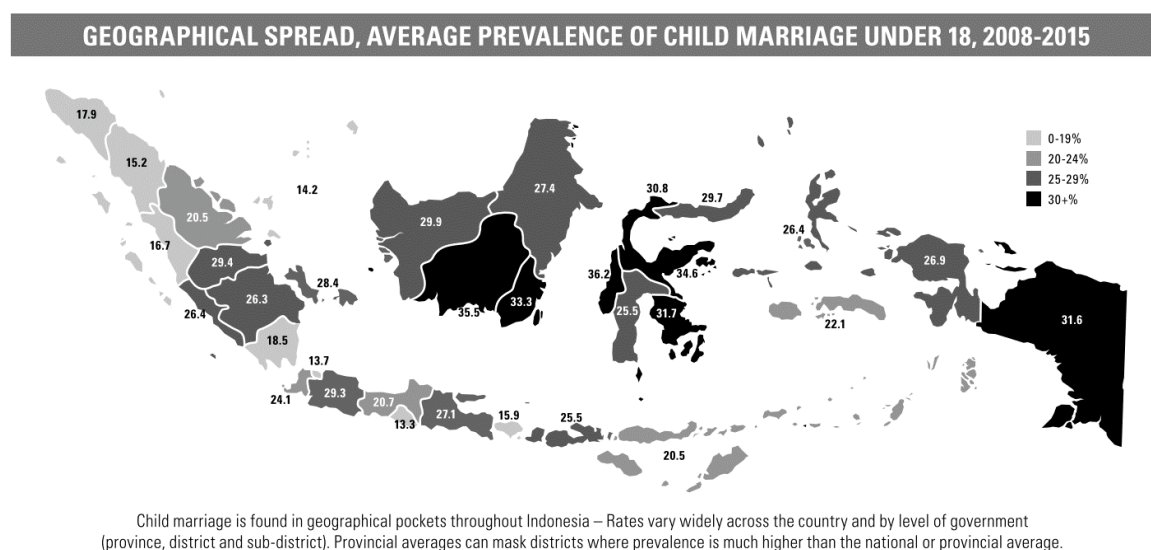
view marriage through the lens of Islam as their guidelines. Islam, as the source of knowledge, guides the individuals to understand and experience the reality. As Platt (2017, p.18) stated, the value and norms in Islam “permeates” individuals' daily experience, including how they understand the concept of a relationship between husband and wife, as well as the gender roles that are prescribed in the Quran.

In some cultures, marriage is considered a communal rather than individual practice that involves not only the married couple but also their entire family, extended family, and community (Bennett, 2014; Delprato & Akyeampong, 2017). Shared values and beliefs related to early marriage are produced through interpersonal relationships and connections in social networks. In this case, community members may apply social pressure on each other by sanctioning the failure to conform and thus influence individual's perceptions of early marriage (Delprato & Akyeampong, 2017; Gage, 2013). Hence, social influence is pertinent to understanding change in marriage practices in the society.

The role of marriage becomes all the more crucial in rural parts of Indonesia. On a personal level, marriage is a medium for women to experience romantic love, companionship, sexual fulfillment, motherhood, and the achievement of an adult status in their community (Platt, 2017). Considering there is a limited option other than marriage for girls to become women in Indonesia, especially those who live in rural areas where they have limited access to information and choice references, to enter into marriage at a younger age is a rite of passage (Bennet 2013).

## Early Marriage in Indonesia

Since 2008, the early marriage rate in Indonesia has remained relatively stable around 25%, having declined only slightly from 27.4% in 2008 to 22.8% in 2015 (UNICEF, 2016). Marriage among girls below the age of 15 declined slightly during the same time period (from 3.0% to 1.1%) with rural areas accounting for most of this decrease, whereas marriage among girls aged 16 and 17 has plateaued (accounting for 20.2% of marriages in 2008 and 19.3% of marriages in 2015). In 2015, West Sulawesi and South Kalimantan had the highest prevalence rates (34.2% and 33.7% respectively). In 2012, West and East Java had the highest absolute number of girls married before the age of 18 (322,889 and 237,307 respectively), followed by Central Java (146,034) (see Figure 2; UNICEF, 2016).



*Figure 2: The Prevalence of Early Marriage in Indonesia in Each Province (UNICEF, 2016, p.1)*

The districts with the highest prevalence rate of female adolescent marriage can be found in Central Java, East Java and South Kalimantan (UNICEF, 2016). Provincial averages can mask districts where prevalence is much higher than the national or

provincial average. For example, while Central Java's provincial prevalence has been consistently low (13.5% in 2012), Wonosobo has the highest district prevalence nationally (63% in 2010) (See Figure 3).

No	Provinces	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2015	Average Prevalence
1	West Sulawesi	40.6	36.0	36.4	36.7	35.5	34.3	34.2	36.2
2	Central Kalimantan	37.5	36.3	34.6	34.9	38.2	33.3	33.6	35.5
3	Central Sulawesi	38.0	37.8	37.2	30.7	32.0	34.7	31.9	34.6
4	South Kalimantan	33.9	32.1	30.1	32.9	34.5	35.6	33.7	33.3
5	Southeast Sulawesi	35.1	32.1	30.7	29.9	31.1	32.5	30.2	31.7
6	Papua	38.2	39.7	33.0	30.1	30.1	26.2	24.1	31.6
7	Gorontalo	32.1	33.9	27.9	31.9	35.3	28.1	26.2	30.8
8	West Kalimantan	28.2	31.1	29.0	30.6	29.9	28.6	32.2	29.9
9	North Sulawesi	34.8	29.9	31.3	29.2	28.0	25.9	28.7	29.7
10	Jambi	32.2	28.9	28.2	31.3	30.9	28.9	25.5	29.4
11	West Java	33.1	30.4	28.0	30.2	30.9	26.7	25.9	29.3
12	Bangka Belitung Islands	29.3	29.9	25.4	28.0	28.6	32.2	25.5	28.4
13	East Kalimantan	29.0	26.4	23.5	23.5	31.1	27.5	31.1	27.4
14	East Java	29.5	28.5	28.0	27.3	26.3	25.9	24.5	27.1
15	West Papua	22.2	33.0	24.5	27.1	29.0	24.5	28.1	26.9

*Figure 3: 15 Provinces in Indonesia with The Highest Prevalence of Early Marriage (UNICEF, 2017, p.4)*

In East Java, the provincial prevalence is 16.7% in 2012, while the prevalence in its districts<sup>1</sup> or regency (*kabupaten*) range from 5 to 35% and its sub-districts<sup>2</sup> (*kecamatan*) range from 2 to 64% in 2010. The districts in East Java with the highest prevalence (Bondowoso at 35%, Probolinggo at 35%, Situbondo at 34%, and Sumenep at 32%) have sub-districts with even higher prevalence rates, such as Sumbermalang in Situbondo with 64%. According to BKKBN (National Population and Family Planning Board), the prevalence of early marriage in East Java Province exceeds the national rate of 53 per 1,000.

Population that accounts for the highest prevalence in East Java is the Madurese ethnic group. Those regencies (Bondowoso, Probolinggo, Situbondo, and Sumenep) and sub-district (Sumbermalang) are the home of Madurese people and Madurese speakers. Most of them migrated from Madura Island to the north part of East Java. Madurese ethnic group has the lowest age at marriage in the province (Jones, 2001). Almost 60 percent of teenagers in Sumenep, one of the regencies in Madura Island, home of Madurese ethnic group, carry out early marriage in 2015 (Muhith, Fardiansyah, & Saputra, 2018)

### **Early Marriage in the Context of Madurese Ethnic Group and Madurese Spoken Community**

The Madurese are an ethnic group originally from the island of Madura, but now can be found in many parts of Indonesia. They are the third-largest ethnic group by population after Javanese and Sundanese. During the national population census

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<sup>1</sup> District or Regency (also known as *kabupaten* in Indonesia) is a second-level administrative division of Indonesia, directly administrated under a province

<sup>2</sup> Subdistrict (known as *kecamatan*) is the administrative division under a district or regency



conducted in Indonesia in 2010, the Madurese people make up 3.03% of the country's population, or around 7,179,356 people (BPS, 2011). The Madurese people speak the Madurese language. In some parts of East Java among a significant number of Madurese population, a peculiar mixture of the Madurese-Javanese dialect has formed. In addition to these native languages, some of them are also fluent in Indonesian, the national language. The Madurese ethnic group of East Java are concentrated on Madura Island and also in other parts, particularly in the areas of the 'East Hook' (the peninsula extending from Surabaya to Banyuwangi), including Situbondo Regency (see Figure 4).

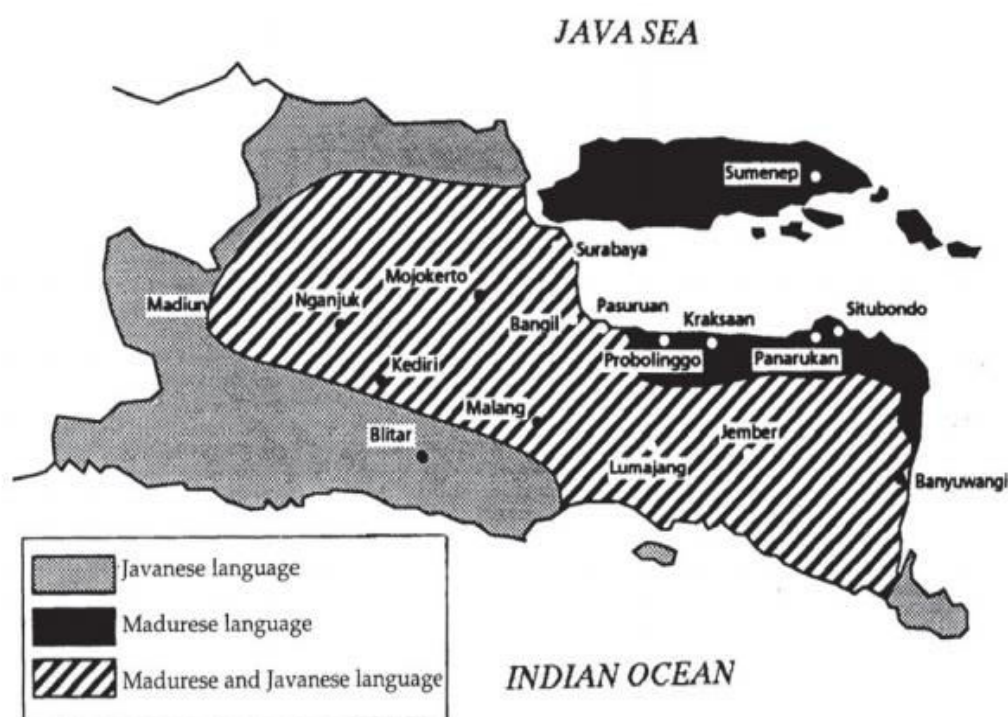


Figure 4: The Language Maps in East Java (Husson, 1997, p.94)

The Madurese have left their Madura Island since centuries ago to make a living elsewhere (de Jonge, 1988; Nootboom, 2003). Madurese migration is partly the result of geographical factors such as aridity, scarcity of good soil, deforestation and erosion. Dutch colonial authorities were responsible for the massive deforestation of the island in the 19th century, resulting in the barrenness of the soil and drying up of the springs and forcing the Madurese peasants into a hazardous work situation, constructing the great plantations of East Java (Husson, 1997).

Another factor that explains Madurese migration to East Java is the fact that “the seas that apparently set lands apart, also bring them closer” in terms of economic and cultural (Lombard, 1990 p:15) between Javanese in East Java and Madurese in Madura Island. Madura Island almost appears as an extension of Java, which actively encourages frequent travel between the islands. This geography is allowing the close historical links as well as transfer of men and goods (Husson, 1997).

According to the oldest records, out-migration from Madura to East Java dates from the 13th century (Husson, 1997). By 1800, more Madurese lived outside Madura than on the island itself. Most of the migrants settled in Eastern Java, but in the 19th century, small numbers also left for the northern part of Indonesia (de Jonge & Nootboom, 2006). It continued regularly until the end of the 19th century when it suddenly peaked, stimulated first by the needs of the plantation economy and later by the economic development of Indonesia (see Figures 5 and 6).

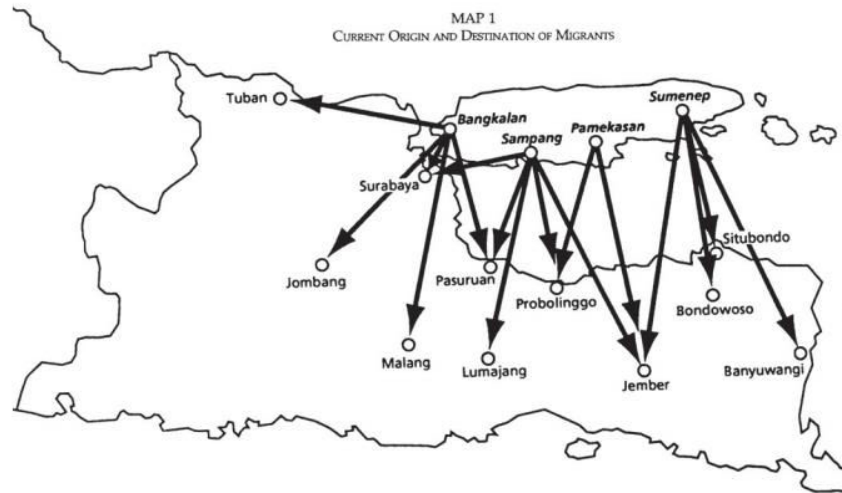


Figure 5: The Maps of Madurese Migration from Madura Island to East Java (Husson, 1997, p.93)



Figure 6: The Population of Madurese Community in East Java Province (Retrieved from: [https://joshuaproject.net/assets/media/profiles/maps/m13199\\_id.pdf](https://joshuaproject.net/assets/media/profiles/maps/m13199_id.pdf))

The Madurese cherish their own norms and values and adhere to their traditions. They tend to live soberly, save money to invest, marry very young, and work together as a group. As peasants, unskilled, or lowly-skilled laborers they do not really trust the importance of education (Husson, 1997). According to Hendro (2001), the majority of Madurese can neither read nor write. Children are often kept away from school to help in making a living. Only religious knowledge seems to be appreciated. The Madurese are Muslims who conscientiously meet their ritual obligations (de Jonge & Nootboom, 2006). Madurese people are well-known as hard workers, harsh yet fierce to enemies, and loyal to friends and relatives (de Jonge & Nootboom, 2006; Husson, 1997).

Data from the 1995 Census Survey showed that the regions with the earliest age at marriage in Indonesia are West Java and East Java. In East Java, the Madurese ethnic group has the lowest age at marriage in the province (Jones, 2001). This data indicates that the Madurese ethnic group, including Madurese spoken people, is the earliest-marrying group in Indonesia with one out of four women having married before reaching the age of 16. The Madurese not only maintain their status as the earliest-marrying Indonesians over many decades, but also have caused their younger cohorts to show less inclination to raise their age at marriage (Jones, 2001).

Some reasons for early-marriage practice among Madurese are the strong adherence to Islamic beliefs and the low levels of education (Jones, 2001). Marrying girls at a very young age was considered normal and there was no sense that a young girl in this community had the right to choose whether to marry, when to marry, or whom to marry.

Half of early marriages in Madurese ethnic groups are arranged. Girls married at early ages tend to have larger age differences with their husbands than those married later, and it is more likely that their marriages were arranged, unwanted, and unexpected (Erulkar, 2013). Given the “arranged” circumstances, girls tend to lose their power of themselves, their bodies, even their future. Considering early marriage in the Madurese ethnic group and Madurese spoken people, arranged marriage could potentially repeal women’s agency. Women’s voice and powers of negotiation are profound for their bargaining power related to marital decision (Delprato & Akyeampong, 2017).

Niehof (1985) conducted research at two villages in Madura Island. The median age at marriage for women was 12-14. Husbands were typically about five years older. In one of the villages, about half of marriages were to kin, and in the other about a quarter. The actual consummation of the marriage could take between a few days and a few months. In many cases, the young bride would resist sexual advances by her husband by kicking and lashing out or by a fit of hysterical crying. A dukun (shaman) or kiyai (religious teacher) was frequently consulted in order to counter the black magic by a jealous rival, the normal explanation for such behavior. If the girl finally overcame her fears and resistance, the marriage proceeded. If not, a divorce was the only way out. The difficulty of establishing satisfactory relations between the bridal couple was a frequent cause of divorce.

Another study focused on the Madurese spoken community in Lumajang, East Java. Indraswati (1999) was able to conduct fieldwork in one village in the Lumajang Regency, East Java, in September 1999. Although Lumajang is quite far from Madura, about 15% of its population are Madurese. In the sub-district of Rawakangkung, where

the study village was located, about 60% are Madurese, and in the village itself, about 85% are Madurese. Many of the older women interviewed spoke only Madurese and could not understand Indonesian national language. The vast majority of this Madurese population has lived in this area for generations, with only very limited supplementation from more recent migrants from Madura. Indraswari (1999), vividly described the terror experienced by women interviewed who had been married off at very young ages. Some of them received very rough treatment from their husbands at the time of their first sexual intercourse, causing great physical and mental distress. Sexual relations came to be seen as part of a wife's duty rather than something pleasurable. She was told of a 12-year-old girl, in fifth-grade primary school, who was married to a 23-year-old son of Muslim religious teacher. Although this was supposed to be an arranged marriage, the husband frequently forced himself on the young girl without her parents' knowledge, and she had no choice to refuse.

### **Early Marriage and Women's Well-Being**

Early marriage is a violation of girls' human rights that can limit their education, health, future income and safety. It is quite alarming as the various adverse effects of early marriage ranging from economic losses to health deterioration that harm women's well-being (Dewi & Dartanto, 2018). The main negative consequences for girls are including reduced education opportunities, reproductive health hazards (difficult deliveries and a higher risk of HIV/AIDS; premature babies with disabilities), and increased risk of mother and child mortality. A married girl is frequently expected to bear a child soon after marriage, representing a significant health risk to both the girl and her baby (Erulkar, 2013). Early marriage also leads to psychological trauma that is caused by

domestic and sexual violence that might include the exploitation of child and human trafficking (Grijns & Horii, 2018). These adverse outcomes contribute to decrease young women's well-being.

Early marriages mark the end of their childhood and any possibility of further personal growth and development. As adolescence is defined as the future development of transition between childhood and adulthood that include changes in the biological, cognitive, and social-emotional (Hejazziey, 2016), a marriage within this period would be a huge challenge. They need to learn new roles as an adult woman, wife and mother right away after their marriage.

First, it is associated with increased fertility and population growth because early marriage lengthens the time girls and women spend in childbearing years and shortens the time span between generations. Second, young women in areas that are remote and rural, underdeveloped, and poor are more vulnerable to early marriage that leads them to the more challenging access toward education and skills learning. Third, besides the problems for individuals, there are also negative consequences of child marriage for society (Grijns & Horii, 2018). Early marriage gives rise to intergenerational poverty, as they will not be able to provide a good resource for their offspring.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

To understand how Madurese women constructed meanings around the institution of marriage, the symbolic interactionism theory was chosen to guide the study. Symbolic interaction theory focuses on the connection between symbols and interactions to understand how humans create symbolic worlds and how those worlds, in turn, shape human behavior. Symbolic interactionism provides effective tools to understand the

experience of early-marriage family (Blumer, 1969; LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). The primary premise of this perspective is that individuals, in this case women who got married early, responded to physical, philosophical and social objects according to the meanings that they created through constant and active interaction within their diverse contexts of their community.

Symbolic interaction theory also holds that individuals, such as women in rural areas, are social actors who act toward objects, including conceptual “objects” such as marriage and being a wife, on the basis of the meanings that those things have for them (Blumer, 1969). Such meanings are necessarily worked out in the course of social interaction and accumulated social experience (Blumer, 1969). Interactionists similarly stress the self-conceptions and identities that romantic partners, parents, neighbors, bring to and develop in the context of those relationships, moral and role identities, such as “mother,” “wife,” “child,” and “partner.” Such identities are to some degree informed by the roles that learned socially and expectations operating in the social lives of early-marriage women. In this sense, social relationships in the community are largely driven by the self and identity needs of participants.

The main assumptions that underpin the symbolic interaction perspective are that reality is a subjective construct, and as such, structures and meanings are socially derived through interaction (Charon, 2008). Using symbolic interaction I tried to understand the interaction of the individuals or early-married women involved in relation to investigate aspects such as meaning, socialization, expectation, and the internal conversations that they may have as they define the situation in that community and determine their action towards marriage. This interaction is characterized by the use of symbols and actions that



are interpreted and defined then redefined by the individuals and responded to the definitions (Blumer, 1969). As such, symbolic interaction takes the view that the meaning associated with an object is learned and that this meaning is modified during interaction.

As young women in a rural area are socialized, they learn the collective understandings and patterns in the social groups (Brown, 2005), in this case Madurese ethnic group, and settings to which they belong. By interacting with others, a young woman can learn the particular meanings, attitudes, and behaviors related to marriage that are significant for that group. They can also learn common definitions of situations that allow people to act in a certain way. This process of socialization is a lifelong process, with individuals being socialized by various groups and in turn acting as a socializing agent on those groups, then passing the information to the other individuals. The dialectical relationship between society and the individual means that through interaction, society shapes the individual and that once the self is developed, the individual through his or her ongoing interaction shapes society (Blumer, 1969).

Symbolic interaction views society as an interactive process that is in a continuous state of definition and redefinition (Blumer, 1969). Because of that, the skills of role taking and self-indication in the process of socialization are important to maintain the society. The process of meaning making is emerging continuously among the people within society. Although language is a powerful symbol and easily passed on, the context is essential to know the meaning of it. For instance, the language “marriage” can be understood as a different experience between communities. Therefore, the consequences and the expectation about how to act in a given situation will be various depending on the community’s value of the experience.

Other than learning the social norms and making meaning of experiences, women as individuals also learn about identity or the meaning of themselves in a social construction role (Larossa & Reitzes, 1993). Roles are the systems of meaning that are understood and practiced by the occupants or individuals with the other individuals they interact with to anticipate future behavior to maintain a regular process in the social interaction (Larossa & Reitzes, 1993). In other words, women will get and learn their self-meaning in a set of social norms that carries expectations in terms of marriage and family. Prior to their own marriage, they can see themselves as a daughter or sibling. Then, once they get married, new roles will follow such as wife or spouse and mother. Since every role has different expectations, adaptation and ongoing socialization are always needed for individuals in order to adjust themselves in a community as expected.

In order to explain the practice of getting married at an early age through a broader point of view, along with women's roles, women agency in the society needs to be taken into account. Agency is the capacity to act (Charrad, 2010, p.1), within the influence of cultural and religious frameworks (Platt, 2017). It implied that women's decision about marriage are not always solely guided by their individual desires, but also involving family, community, and religious values, especially within the Madurese community which is communal in nature.

### **Self as Researcher**

I am a graduate student in Family Social Science at the University of Minnesota. During my study in graduate school, I focus to learn more about adolescents' sexuality, early marriage, and community-based prevention across culture.

I have a background in digital creative media production. After graduating from my undergraduate college, majoring in Communication studies, I worked in a digital advertising agency. Through one of my projects, I developed web-based prevention and education campaigns for young girls aged 12-18. I worked with a lot of young women, discussing sexuality, reproduction health, sex education, and self-improvement. This experience led me to pursue a higher education, to upgrade my knowledge and skills in the fields.

As I grew up in a rural area in Indonesia, where early marriage is a common practice, I have the desire to conduct a research about women who get married at a young age and their family. I witness my childhood friends in my neighborhood dropping out from school, getting married at an early age, then bearing a child right away, without pursuing a better well-being as their parents. Although I perceive that I and my early-married friends were coming from the same socio-economic status, we have a different values and points of view towards marriage. Therefore, I want to learn more about the lived experiences and the values behind women's decision to get married.

I decided to conduct research in a rural area, about 300 miles away from my hometown since that particular area has the highest prevalence of early marriage in Indonesia. The population of that area are mostly Madurese people, which is a different ethnic group from me. I belong to Javanese ethnic group. Although Madurese and Javanese speak different languages and have some different cultural values, I am quite familiar with the Madurese people. Moreover, we have similar religious beliefs as Muslims.

As I stated earlier, I have some biases that might have influenced how I interpreted the lived experience of Madurese early married women. Specifically, I am an outsider of the Madurese culture, and I have limited interactions with married women in the Madurese community. I have a higher education degree and came from a family that values education before marriage. My family has the resources to send me to a better school; thus, I grew up during my teenage years surrounded by other women who are single. All these experiences might have influenced how I approached the interviews and interpreted the stories of the Madurese women who participated in my study. To minimize these biases, as a researcher, I worked together with an interpreter who is a cultural insider, local Madurese community members, and three graduate students who are from the culture.

## **Methods**

### **Phenomenology**

Based on the symbolic interaction theory, a phenomenological method (Wertz, 2011) is adopted for this study, since it focuses on the human experiences and the “consciousness of physical things, values, moods, activities, and feelings” (Daly, 2007, p.94). This method is suitable to capture the unique experience, the story on how it is like to be in a family which has an early-married daughter living in a particular area within a certain community in Indonesia. Considering Indonesia is a multicultural country, containing hundreds of different ethnic groups, understanding one of its cultures could acknowledge the diversity.

The goal is not to generalize my findings to all early marriage women and their parents in Indonesia; instead, it is to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences

of women in regard to the meaning of marriage and how that meaning-making informs the decision to get married. The aim of the phenomenology is to “transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence” (Manen, 1990, p.36) in some way that the result can reflect the actual lived experience. Hence, studying the unique lived experience of early-marriage family is not all about capturing the unique value, but also showing the richness of the meaning making process that can be recognized by others.

### **Procedures**

This study’s procedures were approved by the University of Minnesota Institutional Review Board (study reference: STUDY00006631) prior to making the contact to the participants in Indonesia.

In Indonesia, each neighborhood has a chairperson to oversee families’ activities called *Mudin*. Usually, people ask for suggestions and open discussion, including family ceremonials such as birth, wedding, or death of family members to *Mudin*. Indonesia has a communal culture in which each family in a neighborhood knows each other very well. Hence, *Mudins* have access to the family data and marriage records. *Mudins* can be found in the village meeting house (*Balai Desa*).

I approached the *Mudin* of the intended area for assistance. Once he/she agreed to help with the study, I asked them to send the notification letter about this study to the list of potential participants. Most people are registered in the neighborhood; therefore, the *Mudins* in the areas can send the notification letter to couples who were married before the age of 18. Those who are interested can get back to me. I will contact them to screen who is eligible to participate in the study.

Indonesian young women who were married early were targeted in this study, along with their mothers. Child bride is a woman who gets married, either registered or not, before the age of 18. All of the participants must be at least 18 years old at the time of interview so they can give their consent apart from their parents. The goal of this study was to recruit at least 20 women, either the early married daughters or the mothers. Qualitative researchers suggest that saturation can be reached between five and twenty-five interviews (Creswell, 1998; Francais et al., 2009).

Eligible participants were scheduled for an interview. However, during this process, participants were given the choice to say no if they objected to participate. Once receiving their consent, I visited their house to introduce the study and asked for their consent to be part of this study. Since most Indonesian people do not speak English, the interviews for this study were conducted in the Indonesian national language. At the remote area where the study was conducted, there were few people who are unable to read; however, I still included them in the study as long as they met the inclusion criteria. Due to these conditions, written consent had been waived. In exchange, I asked for their consent in person and were recorded. Careful explanations about the consent process and data privacy in the native language to ensure they know what the risks and benefits are involved in the study before agreeing to participate.

Each participant was given a one-time honorarium of \$10 U.S. dollar in cash (or approximately IDR150.000) since gift cards are not feasible in rural areas in Indonesia.

### **Recruitment Sites**

Specifically, participants were recruited from a sub-district in East Java, which has the highest prevalence rates (64%) of early marriage in Indonesia, that is the sub-

district of Sumbermalang (UNICEF, 2016). Sumbermalang is a sub-district in Situbondo Regency, East Java, Indonesia. This sub-district is about 55 km from the capital of Situbondo Regency to the southwest. The center of government is in the village of Tlogosari. Most of the Sumbermalang region is located on the slopes of the Argapura Mountains. It has nine villages, Alas Tengah, Baderan, Kalirejo, Plalangan, Sumber Argo, Taman, Taman Sari, Taman Kursi, and Tlogosari. The population of Sumbermalang sub-district is 26,982 and most of them are Madurese or Madura spoken people.

The researcher used a notification letter (Appendix D) that includes the introduction of the study, procedures, risks and benefits to be in the study, and the researcher's contact information to recruit participants.

### **Participants' Characteristics**

Thirty women, 24 early-married daughters and 6 mothers of early-married daughters from nine villages in Sumbermalang sub-district participated in this study. My original intention was to get some pairs of mother-daughters for this study. However, I got only 6 mothers who met the requirements and agreed to be interviewed, and five of the mothers participated in this study with their daughters. Since I only had 5 mother-daughter pairs, I lumped all data together and used each individual interview as the unit of analysis even though one of the mothers reported marrying later than 18 years old.

Most of the participants (83.3%) reported that they are married or remarried, (13.3%) and only a few reported that they were divorced (3.3%). The mean age of the participants was 25.6 years (SD = 8.69). The youngest participant was 18 (the daughter) and the oldest participant was 44 years old (the mother). In addition to that, the mean age

of first marriage was 15.7 years ( $SD = 2.02$ ) while their spouse's (or ex) age of first marriage was 20.5 years ( $SD = 4.13$ ). Regarding the education level and employment status, most of them only finished their primary school (33.3%) and became a housewife (46.7%). (See Table 1 in Appendix A).

## **Interviews**

Participants who agree to participate in the interview were contacted and set up an appointment for the face-to face interview. All interviews were conducted at participants' homes or at a place that is convenient to them. Each interview lasted for 90 minutes and all interviews were conducted in their native language, Bahasa Indonesia. All of the conversations were audio recorded and some of them, who gave consent also were video recorded.

I was helped by an interpreter, a Madurese college student (who is not the part of the community), to interpret some of the languages or gestures for both me and participants. First, I asked the participants a question in Bahasa Indonesia. If the participants understand it, they would answer it in Bahasa Indonesia. Second, when the participant did not really understand what I asked, the interpreter would explain it in their language. Third, if they were not sure how to answer it in Bahasa Indonesia, they would use Madurese language to reply. The interpreter explained the participants' answers. Last, if the participant fluent in Bahasa Indonesia, the interpreter would still explain the terms that both researcher and participants used (that was not understood) in their sentences while interviews were going.



For all of the participants who lived in the same house, the interviews between parents and daughters were conducted separately to maintain confidentiality. Both daughters and parents could not listen or watch the interview of the others. The ambience, environment, and house atmosphere were considered as well to support the participants' answer. The topic about relationships, marriage status, and family problems were considered a very private area (See the interview questions in Appendix E). Indonesian people also rarely talk about their feelings. Therefore, it is important to state at the beginning about the consent and agreement. I also emphasized that this interview has nothing to do with the village official or even the Mudins' interest.

### **Transcription and Translation**

Six individuals, including me, the other three Indonesian graduate students of the University of Minnesota, and 2 Indonesian-English sworn translators, were involved in the transcription and translation process. All of them are fluent in both English and Bahasa Indonesia, and one of them is fluent in Madurese ethnic group language as well.

I, with the assistance of the translators, transcribed the audio recording of the interviews into word documents. First, due to the fact that some of the participants used Madurese language to say some idioms, the graduate student who is fluent in that language gave supervision and made sure they were well-transcribed. Second, some of the participants that did not speak Bahasa Indonesia very well were assisted by an interpreter. The graduate student who supervised the transcription would make sure that the sentences participants had spoken, how the interpreter explained, and the transcription result were all coherent. Third, all of the transcriptions were translated in English. The Indonesian version of the transcripts were used for the analysis for this thesis.

## Data Analysis

The data obtained from the semi-structured interviews with 30 participants were analyzed using content analysis methods. This method is commonly used in phenomenological studies (Özyiğit, 2017). The detailed steps in the analysis were described below.

*Preparation for Analysis.* I moved the demographic data that had been collected from paper into a digital file. All of the participants' names were changed into pseudonyms to keep their confidentiality, including the audio, video, transcription, and translation file names and the names in all tables. A code book was created to record all of them for future reference. The transcription files were categorized by the mothers and the daughter's data to make it easier for me to distinguish their stories based on their role.

*Draft Coding.* I read all of the transcription one time to get the big picture of the stories. Then, I read them again and made some notes. Visiting the video and audio files were done as well if necessary, to understand the contexts. I looked over the notes that had been taken during the second reading then created a table to record relevant information. The relevant information in the table includes demographic information, key information based on the participants' interview, and code that represent each key information (See Appendix C).

During the process of draft coding and coding, I worked with three other graduate students of the University of Minnesota who are fluent both in English and Bahasa Indonesia to make sure the researcher's interpretation of the data was adequate, appropriate, and consistent. One of the students that is also fluent in the ethnic group's native (Madurese) language validated the translation and interpretation of the data,

according to the context. Although the interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, some of the participants inserted some vocabularies, expressions, and phrases in Madurese language.

*Coding.* Using the key information code, I identified the themes that emerge in the interview and related to the research questions. The saturated theme was determined by the frequency of the data emerging in that theme. Based on (Padilla-Walker & Carlo, 2004), a theme is well saturated if the frequency is not less than 25% of the focused data.

*Organization of the Data.* After getting the picture of the emerging theme, I put the data into a table, categorized by the research question. Those tables include the research question, themes and sub-themes, samples of quotes, and frequencies. Based on this data organization, I developed the research report (See tables 2, 3, and 4 in Appendix B).

*Reporting.* As stated previously, all of the participants' names reported for the manuscript were changed to fictitious names of flowers and wooden trees to maintain participants' confidentiality and make it easier to distinguish participants' stories. Organized tables were used to write the results of the study.

### **Trustworthiness**

Qualitative research has a tradition of making one's implicit assumptions and biases becomes staring out (Morrow, 2005). Therefore, it is important to acknowledge my previous assumptions regarding the research topic. Since many factors may interfere with a fair collection and interpretation of data, Morrow suggested qualitative researchers to take into account emotional involvement with the topic of interests, presuppositions

formed reading the literature, and various aspects of interaction with research participants. In order to deal with biases and assumptions that come from their own life experiences or in interactions with research participants, qualitative researchers adapt the reflexive approach (Morrow, 2005).

In this current research, I used a number of strategies to obtain fairly representative participants' realities, including, within the data gathering process, asking for clarification and more deeply into the meanings of the participants. I repeatedly asked for confirmation right away during the interview when participants gave an ambiguous or unclear explanation, as well as when participants unconsciously used their native language to express their feelings or phrases. I wanted to make sure that her understanding is reliable since I have the responsibility to learn from the interviewee how well my interpretations reflect the interviewee's meanings. This is particularly important since I am not part of the community and have different social values as participants.

Moreover, I also worked with the other graduate students to obtain a consensus interpretation of the transcription data. I shared the word document table that includes the name of participants and the key information based on the emerging themes to the other graduate students who worked with me. They were also given two translation transcripts to code and fill out the empty tables with the emerging themes. After filling out the tables, I matched both the results with my interpretation. If there were some differences, I approached those students to discuss these interpretations until we all got the consensus. Based on this consensus, I continued to analyze the rest of the data.

## Results

Based on the thorough analytic process, several themes were emerged under each research question. Therefore, themes were presented in the order of the research questions as follows: explaining the reasons for early marriage, making sense of early marriage, and lived experiences related to the consequences of early marriage.

### Explaining the Reasons for Early Marriage

Almost all of the participants (n=29) started the story of their marriage experience by mentioning how they met their spouse in the past. Five major themes emerged to explain why they decided to get married at an early age: *love* (n=21), *being betrothed* (n=10), *economic benefits* (n=8), and *community pressure* (n=7).

**Marriage for Love.** One of the most common words participants used to express their reason to get married with their husbands is love (*cinta*). They did not often talk about their feelings with strangers, but whenever being asked the reason they got married, these women answered “love”. Timidly, Gardenia, shared her story of how she felt in love with her husband and wanted to marry him, “Because of love. If I think about it again, getting married early is hard. I didn’t even finish my study in senior-high school, so it’s hard for me to find a proper job. The point is, love is blind. I didn’t think about it thoroughly before... I am happy because I have someone who looks after me, who always accompanies me. I feel safe to tell everything to my husband.”

The other words, besides love, that they used to describe the feeling they experience with their husband are “happy”, “care”, “safe”, and “accompany”. Supporting this idea, Gardenia explained her feelings, “I am happy because I have someone who looks after me, who always accompanies me. I feel safe to tell everything to my

husband.” These feelings emerged, not only for those who chose their own husband, but also who were betrothed by their parents as Magnolia said, “We didn’t date back then. He was my parents’ choice, not mine. We got married, when I was 15 years old... we both love each other, even though he was not my own choice, but my parents’. I was happy. Now I have a child and I’m happy.”

Most of the participants admitted that the main reason they wanted to get married, even in the early age, is happiness (*kebahagiaan*). They perceived that being with someone they love makes them happy and there is no reason to postpone the marriage as long as both of them are in love. As Bougainville stated, “Happiness. If I didn’t have it's not because of my husband, I wouldn’t be happy. So, I think it's better to get married.”

Happiness is going hand in hand with companionship in their stories. They are happy because they have someone to accompany them, either to talk about their future plan, share their experience, and help each other, especially to do their job (farming). Oak told a story of how she sees her daughter’s reason to get married, “If they are married, they will be able to discuss (their plans) with their partner. If they stay single, they won’t have a partner to share their problems with.”

Similar to this story, Amaryllis also emphasized her needs for someone to talk to in her life, “We have a friend to talk to. I used to be all alone because my parents worked in Bali. I used to keep my problem alone, but now I have a friend to share. If I talk to my husband, I feel like my problem is solved. We don’t need to fight over something like my neighbors who split up.” Moreover, Palmtree, who is a farmer, confessed that having a husband helps her a lot with the labor work, “After my first husband died, I married again

right away because I needed someone to work together with me. If I didn't marry, I wouldn't have company."

**Arranged Marriage by Parents.** Some participants saw marriage as a life choice that they could not decide for their own. Some of them did not know if they were engaged until a few weeks prior to the marriage ceremony, as Teaktree said, "At first, I didn't know my husband. I just knew him once we got engaged. Two months later, we got married. I used to dislike him since he was my parents' choice. I used to be afraid of my husband." This fright emerged because she barely knew her husband and did not have enough time to get to know each other. She said that agreeing to be betrothed by her parents is the way she can be a good daughter. Sandalwood also shared the same feeling as she stated, "I was betrothed to him by my parents when I was still in the sixth grade in elementary school. Of course, I was shocked. Three months later, we got married. I was afraid I might not be able to eat and work properly." She added that she could not sleep with her husband. Every night was always frightening for her back then. To address this issue, her parents inserted an amulet to her bra so she could calm down and started to like her husband.

Different from Teaktree and Sandalwood, Chrysant said that her engagement was better. Although she perceived that she was not ready at first, at the end she became interested in her husband. She stated, "We had been betrothed by our parents since I was 8 or 9 years old. After graduating from elementary school, we got married. I was betrothed when I was still young, so I felt I wasn't ready. However, my parents convinced me to continue our engagement. I have become interested in him since then."

**Marriage for Economic Benefits.** It is common in participants' stories that marriage is one of their ways to escape poverty. As Sandalwood disclosed, “When I was a child, I was so poor and it was difficult to afford enough food to eat. But since I have a husband, we can earn money for our needs. My life becomes prosperous”, she wanted to explain how life was hard for her in the past. After getting married, she had someone to provide for her needs. The other participant, Chryasant, also said the similar stories, “If my family was well-off and I had given a chance to choose, I think I would still continue my study. However, it was difficult to earn money at that time and I believed once I got married, I would share the cost of living together with my husband. I am happy. It’s better than before. In the past if I wanted something, I had to keep it by myself, but now my husband will help me to earn it. For example, our house and field. Thank God, even though our house is not as good as anyone else’s houses, it’s enough to make me happy.” They perceived that marriage brought them economic benefits and changed their lives for the better.

Some of the participants also emphasized that having a husband means they have someone to rely on financially. Bougainville said, “I am very grateful that my husband is a good man. After having a daughter, we are able to get more income. It’s always enough to cover up our daily needs. Most people think that getting married at a young age makes us always dependent on our parents, but my husband is exceptional. He works on his own. He takes his own business. Although we are still living together with our parents, he still works hard and is able to give money to his wife and child. He is not dependent on my parents. If he wants to give me money for living, he will work hard.”



In addition to that, the other participants perceived that marriage is an institution that grants them money for living, either the money is from their husband alone or from both of them working together. Randu stated, “Even so, years later it would become hard and troublesome. The good thing about getting married is we can earn money, if we don’t have money it will be hard to continue living. However, I’m grateful if my daughters, my husband, and my grandson are all healthy. That makes me happy.” This idea is supported by Buttercup. She mentioned, “We can take care of each other. For example, if you are married, you can work, and you can earn more money. You can ask for money from your husband because he’s no longer asking for money from his parents.”

**Marriage Because of Community Pressure.** Other than parents who usually have the “right” to betroth their daughters, relatives and neighbors also have a contribution in pushing young women to get married as soon as possible as indicated by some participants’ stories. Oak mentioned that she still wanted her daughter to continue her studies, while she was dating her boyfriend. However, Oak had to grant her in-law’s urge to marry their children. “So actually, at that time I still wanted her to study in senior high before getting married. However, her husband’s family insisted on holding the marriage sooner. However, since her husband’s family insisted, I had no other choice.”

Dandelion told her story of how her neighbors pushed her parents to marry her since they had been engaged for too long, “They said I’d rather get married than being talked about by my neighbors. After seven months of engagement, we got married. Actually, both of us didn’t want to get married too soon, but since our parents were afraid that our neighbors might spread rumors about us, we eventually got married.”

Rumors were also the reasons Alamanda decided to get married as soon as she met her husband. Besides avoiding her neighbors' rumors, she also did not want to be catcalled by some men at her village. She said, "Getting married makes me have a lifetime partner, so no one would ever bother me. I feel at ease. Here the neighbors love gossiping, and most of the time, people who stay single are being talked about, 'She hasn't got engaged at that age, what if someone comes to her house. Such a vamp.' So, when I got married I felt relaxed and peaceful. No one would ever bother me again." She was referring to neighbors who liked to spread rumors and harass her in the street as a single woman. She perceived by getting married, her neighbors and the community surrounding her will be pleased and satisfied that no one will not bother her with either rumors or sexual harassment.

### **Making Sense of Early Marriage**

This theme is not explicitly asked during the interviews. However, the theme emerged consistently across the participants' answers. The participants stated at least three social norms that perpetuate the early-marriage practice in this community: Sexual purity, the importance of marriage, familism and the expectation of being a wife.

**Sexual Purity.** As part of communal culture, it is common in the Madurese community to talk about the other people that do not meet the expectation, including the age of first marriage, the social norm controlling women, and marital outcome. This cultural practice has been witnessed by the participants since they were young. As Bougenville said, "They're okay with it (early marriage). On the contrary, they will gossip about every woman who was still single. They might as well gossip about me, since I used to run away (with her boyfriend). Even my sister who went out for one day

to her boyfriend's house got her own gossip, let alone myself.” She continued to say that her neighbors kept talking about misbehaving single women that do not meet their expectations, such as being involved in a courtship with some men or not getting married so early.

In order to make sure that these women are pure and not being involved with any men, the neighbors try to keep in track the people they engage with. This is the reason, as Dandelion stated, “I had to be more careful if I wanted to hang out with my friends. My neighbors will start making rumors if I hang out with someone else but my fiancé... we (she and fiancé) were allowed to hang out together, but we were prohibited to hang out at night or else our neighbors will start making rumors.” She recounted that being together or accompanied by random men, even if it is with their school friends, is still considered a violation of the social norm.

Following this rule, young women tend to have little freedom, even in their own house. They are not allowed to go out freely after they seem big enough (or already reaching their first menstruation). As Sandalwood said, “If we are old enough, we were not allowed to go outside with any men because it might stir false rumors. But if we’re married then we’re free from those rumors.” Based on the participants’ stories, single girls are prohibited to go out unless they are married. Therefore, for some participants, this leads them into an early marriage. It is a substantial value to keep in the community, that young girls should be pure (virgin) until they get married.

**The importance of marriage.** As the consequence of social control, people within the community could make judgments towards another people’s behavior that lead into labeling, especially for women who were unable to obey the rule in the community.

As Bougenville said, “People might blame them if they left their house. People would assume they were naughty since they didn’t have a spouse. Even if they have a spouse, they should go outside with their spouse, or else, people might blame them for leaving their house all alone.” Similarly, women who postpone or do not seem to get married soon, also be labelled as a spinster, as Sandalwood stated, “Any woman who stays single will be called as spinster here. But once we’re married, we will have someone who protects us.” Being negatively labelled as naughty and spinster brings enough pressure for women in this community and provokes them to meet this social expectation. Thus, marriage plays an important role to maintain a good standing in the community, since marriage helps to avoid being labelled as a spinster or a naughty woman.

Participants in this study underlie their judgment regarding the social expectation on their status, physical appearance, and life trajectory. According to the participants, whenever the neighbors see any women that seem mature, they will urge them to get married. They do not consider the other factors such as mental age, health, financial and psychological condition, as well as women’s personal desires to get married. Lavender said, “Here, people look at their appearances. If physically they look big enough, then they will be married, even though they are still young. The neighbors will be super chatty to someone who hasn’t got married.”

Similar to Lavender, Amaryllis experienced that too. She mentioned, “Before I got married, even my aunt kept mocking me. She said a ‘big’ girl should be married. While in fact, I was still in seventh grade. Even my father was being hostile because I didn’t want to marry any men.” Based on these stories, women’s voices were not taken into account for social expectation, especially in terms of marriage. Women tended to be

judged as spinster or naughty women if they do not meet that expectation even though they might have other reasons not to obey the rule.

**Familism and the expectation of being a good wife.** Being married means experiencing new roles, as a wife and mother. The participants (n=29) also told their role in their marriage as a wife. They learned about that role from their parents or caregivers, even though they rarely talked about marriage life. However, some advice about being a wife had been passed down from parents to the daughter prior to marriage. There were four sub-themes that emerged and explained this theme in details: maintaining the family harmony (n=19), obedience to husband (n=13), serving and providing the husband (n=13), , and controlling jealousy (n=7).

*Maintaining the Family Harmony or Sakinah Mawadah Warrahmah (Harmony, Love, and Compassion).* Following the marriage ceremony, the new roles had been assigned to these women. They are no longer their parents' responsibility. The participants stated that it is important to be responsible after they get married. Sandalwood told her daughter that marriage life is different, so she needs to be responsible, "She has other responsibilities once she gets married. I said to my daughter to be responsible once she gets married. The life before and after marriage are different."

Similar to Sandalwood, Oak also gave advice to her daughter regarding marriage life. She stated that a wife should be responsible and maintain family harmony as she said, "I told her, once she got married, she had to get along well with her husband, she should make a harmonious family. They get along well and never have arguments. I think they don't face any problems in their marriage." They both agree that a good family or

husband-wife relationship is the one who never fights and gets along with each other very well.

Oak's daughter, Sunflower, repeated what her mother said. She explained, "My mother asked to never fight with my husband. We have to get along well. My parents have high blood pressure, so I have to get along well with my husband." to express how she is not allowed to have a fight with her husband. The other participant, Lotus, confessed that she was so rude to her husband and her mother was not happy about that. She said that, "I used to be angry easily to my husband, although he was not angry back, my mother was not happy. She told me not to fight with my husband."

One of the values in the family that exists in their religious beliefs is *sakinah, mawadah, warahmah* (harmony, love, and compassion). Some participants mentioned this value in their stories. One of them is Alamanda as she said, "Of course we wish to be a good and blessed family *sakinah, mawadah, warahmah*. My mother told me to follow (mention a family name) as an example. She never fights with her husband and her parents. My mother also told me, I shouldn't fight with my husband, don't let our neighbors overhear our problem."

*Obedient to Husband.* Since the Madurese women believe that the burden of the family changes from their father to the husband right after the marriage ceremony, most participants agreed to be obedient to their husband. Parents, as Sandalwood, told her daughter to obey her husband, "She has to do what her husband wants her to do. For example, if he asks her to buy a pack of cigarettes, she has to do it. She has to be obedient." On the other hand, the daughter, like Dahlia, also mentioned how her parents

emphasized the needs to be obedient, “They said I should obey my husband. I shouldn’t fight with him. I have to be an obedient wife.”

One of the participants, Aster, admitted that being a wife means she should obey her husband since he provides for her and her child. She said, “I shouldn’t be bored with my husband. Moreover, he was my own choice. I should be a good wife who is obedient to her husband. I shouldn’t act like a child anymore. I am a mother now, so I have to act and think maturely.” Alamanda’s story is similar. She perceived that being someone’s wife should have her do everything her husband wants. She mentioned, “Always obey her husband. Always be patient and never get angry easily. I have to obey whatever my husband asks for.”

*Serving and Providing Husband.* Most of the participants are unemployed. They rely on their husband as the breadwinner. In exchange, they perceived that it is their responsibility to take care of the house, provide family with food, and do the chores. Especially, they mentioned how they should act whenever their husbands are going to work and after they come back home. Dandelion told her daily experience with her husband this way: “If my husband comes back from work, I have to make a cup of coffee, prepare his clothes. And after taking a bath, I have to prepare dinner... when my husband is going to work, I have to make him a cup of coffee or breakfast.”

Lotus also has the same experience servicing and providing her husband’s needs. She said, “She has to be kind and knows how to look after her husband. For example, if my husband just came back from work, I had to make a cup of tea for him.” Other than serving and providing, Sandalwood also added that the wife's presence in the house as an

important thing in marriage, “She has to take care of her husband, prepare food, if he comes home from work, the wife is supposed to be at home.”

*Controlling Jealousy.* Maintaining family harmony is not limited to avoiding fights with husbands, but also controlling their feelings that are triggering split-up or even divorce. Some of the participants talked about being worried that their husband would leave them for another woman. Dandelion disclosed how another woman seduced her husband in the past, but she did not want to tell her parents about that. She stated, “We’re both grateful because there used to be some people who wanted to break our engagement. In the past, my husband was seduced by someone else. But I said nothing, I didn’t even tell my parents because I was afraid it might become a big problem between us. But now he always thanks me for being patient even though he hurt me. Now he is faithful to me.” She perceived that expressing her worries would drag them into a bigger problem. Instead, she would rather see her husband as a faithful person and avoid talking about her feelings.

Another story from Gardenia has a similar pattern. She explained her story, “They only told me that I have to save money for future needs. And they told me to always be loyal and faithful to my husband. I think we need to believe in each other more. Since he has a lot of schedules outside and I have to stay at home, sometimes I hear some rumors going around in the neighborhood. I am a jealous type. Moreover, my husband has a lot of exes living in this neighborhood. Actually, I befriend them all. When one of them comes to our home, my husband chooses to leave just in case he might remember his past with her. Fortunately, my husband is not a jealousy type, he didn’t restrict me. He even asked me to tell him if he or the in laws ever treat me badly. So I am allowed to go



wherever I want to go, as long as I am accompanied by someone he knows well.” From her experience, Gardenia learned that she has to be faithful with her husband and trust him.

Other than maintaining their faith in the relationship, Alamanda also emphasized how it is important to take care of the others and to be more understanding. She learned that it is not fair to be jealous of her husband since he is going outside for work to provide for his family. She said, “Sometimes I am afraid that my husband is being seduced by some girls. I want to improve the harmony in this family. I think getting married is not all about money, we have to care and love each other. My husband works from early morning until evening. So I get worried easily when he goes to Taman Kursi. The women who live in that village love to wear sultry outfits.” By this story, it is implied that at some points Alamanda felt insecure and lost her faith towards her husband, although she personally denied admitting that feeling to her husband.

### **Gender Expectation and Inequality**

**Girls vs Boys.** No participants stated explicitly the term “gender equality” in the interviews. However, they mentioned repeatedly about the judgment and treatment differences between women and men in that community. First, men have more freedom than women. Teaktree told us, “Men are free to choose what’s good for them. At least they should marry by the age of 20. It's different from women; they want to get married as soon as possible, while men can have time before they get married later.” She emphasized that men have more choices in the decision of getting married. Men are free to choose whether they want to get married or not, or when they want to get married, while women do not have those options.

Moreover, Teaktree added that men can go out, continue their studies as long as they want, and because of that freedom, it is not uncommon that men might harass any girls. She said, “I am afraid she might be harassed by men. Since graduating from elementary school they (her daughters) are not supposed to go anywhere freely. They (men) are free to go and continue their study. Boys can ride their motorbike and go to school... Men are free to harass any girls. It's okay (for men to impregnate women), but he needs to take responsibility by marrying her.” Because of this concern, she ordered her daughters to stay at home, while she can be more permissive with her sons’ going out.

**Fear of premarital sex and unintended pregnancy for young women.** In this community, as most of the participants narrated, out of wedlock pregnancy will bring shame to the family and premarital sex is highly forbidden. All of participants who are the mother of child bride agreed that marriage is an institution of legal sex. As Teaktree said, “I'm just afraid that they might get pregnant before they get married. So to prevent that, I'd rather marry them first.” In the other words, to prevent premarital sex, she would rather move sexual activity inside the marriage. The idea is supported by Palmtree. She emphasized that early marriage is way better than getting pregnant out of wedlock. She said, “If women were not married early, it would be so hard for them to get someone to marry. Also, it is better to get married early than to get pregnant out of wedlock.”

Since engaging in premarital sex considered is a big sin, parents in this study worried that their daughters might commit that sin. Some of them saw marriage as the institution that keeps young women from doing the bad things, as Maple stated, “The benefit is they will probably be able to detain their behaviors which contradict their religious thoughts (*zina*). They don't do it now, unless it was by accident (unexpected pregnancy).” The mothers reported that they feel at ease whenever their daughters get married because they will not

be accused of doing premarital sex and get pregnant. This is how Sandalwood stated her feeling about that, “I got worried easily when my daughter hung out with her friends since I didn’t know where she went. I was afraid she might get pregnant, but once she got married, I feel at ease now.”

**The need for protection from the husband.** The need for protection from the husband seemed to be applicable only for single women, since they are more likely to be threatened by men outside their house. One of the participants, Lotus, narrated her story of being so vulnerable in her own environment this way: “Once I had a baby, I was allowed to go outside. Before that, I wasn’t as my parents said there might be someone who assaulted me. There used to be a man from another village who liked me, but he had already married and split up with his wife. He was rude. That’s why my father forbade me to go outside. Back then, there was also a man who put a black magic on me. He was my Ustad (spiritual teacher) in Madrasah (Islamic school). He made me like him, but my father disapproved that he even threatened to kill Sonic if I kept liking him.” She stated that it was scary to be chased by men she does not want to engage with. On the other hand, Randhu, her mother at another time stated that, “Parents are also afraid that their daughter might get pregnant before finishing their studies. It’s harder to have a daughter than to have a son.” She recognized that having daughters is so much harder than having sons in this community, considering the danger that she might overcome.

Another similar story from Dandelion. She was not allowed to go out since she was very young yet she looked like an adult woman. She said, “So besides going to school, I just stayed at home. Even though I was still in 6th grade of elementary school, they already assumed I was mature.” Sunflower also told the same story, “Since I was in

the sixth grade of elementary school, I was prohibited to go outside. The only things I did when I went outside were going to school and *ngaji* (reciting Qur'an). Just that. I got home from school at four PM and then I went to *musala* for *ngaji* at five. Hence I was not able to go anywhere else.” These young women acknowledged that being matured (looks like an adult woman physically) has the consequence of staying at home and never being free to go with anyone they want because they might be harassed by men, or being impregnated.

Some participants, including Maple, saw women as passive objects that need to be protected, because if they were broken, they will not be the same as before. She explained, “The same cases (getting pregnant before marriage) also happened to a lot of her (her daughter) friends in junior high school. A woman is like a pearl or diamond, pretty and beautiful, but only one crack (because she loses her virginity) can make it worthless. That’s why, as parents not only have to pray for our children but also give a big effort to protect them, even though I am aware that sometimes I might be negligent towards them.”

### **Lived Experiences Related to the Consequences of Early Marriage**

Twenty-eight participants’ transcripts were used to capture specific stories about the impact of early marriage on the participants’ lives. Two participants were eliminated because they did not answer questions related to the impact of early marriage on their lives. Based on the analyses, the following themes emerged: dropping out of school (n=13), afraid of having children (n=13), and growing up quickly (n=11), and experiencing mood swings (n=7).

**Dropping Out of School.** Two subthemes emerged from the data for this theme. First, participants believed the early marriage influences their parents to be more insecure

and controlled of their lives. For example, Gardenia's parent, Randhu, believed that by sending her daughter to public school would make her daughter more likely to get pregnant out of wedlock. Randu stated, "The parents are afraid. Most of the time, these children lied to us parents. They said they wanted to go to their friend's house but it turned out that they went somewhere else. They are smarter than us. Parents are also afraid that their daughter might get pregnant before finishing their studies. It's harder to have a daughter than to have a son. My husband doesn't allow my daughter to study in public junior-high school but only in Islamic boarding school since there are Ustad (spiritual teachers) there to protect her. Also, students there [in the Islamic boarding school] are not allowed to go anywhere freely. My second daughter was planning to continue her study in Islamic boarding school as well. I know so many cases about young girls who got pregnant before finishing their studies."

The other subtheme emerged was dropping out of school due to early marriage. Dandelion, admitted that it was not her decision to drop out from school but she did not have a lot of choices. She said, "Since seventh grade I studied hard to get good grades so that I could go to the senior high school that I dreamt of. But it turned out like this (dropped out and married early)." Prior to her marriage, she tried so hard to be the best student in school, including her involvement at various school activities. Similarly, Alamanda wanted to be in school as well, but her parents wanted her to stop studying. She said, "I wanted to study, but my parents asked me to get married instead, because at that time, my husband had stopped studying already." Since her husband did not continue his education, it was also a mandatory for Alamanda to stop and stay at home, so they both could only focus on their marriage life. Gardenia added, "If I think about it again,

getting married early is hard. I didn't even finish my study in senior-high school, so it's hard for me to find a proper job. Graduating from senior-high school is better than graduating only from junior-high. I personally wish to continue my study until university, but because of our family financial problem, I couldn't even finish my senior-high."

**Afraid of Having Children.** Having a child is seen as the consequence of getting married. No participant wanted to have children in the future because having children during the teenage years scared them since they knew their body would not adjust very well during pregnancy. Some of the participants told their experience of having bad memories on childbearing. Lotus said, "I used to get married before the age of 18 and it was hard during pregnancy. I gave birth in Situbondo (the nearest city, but still far away from her house) because I was not able to push. It makes me don't want to have a baby anymore." She described it as a one-time experience that she would never go over it forever. Moreover, in her community, shaman and traditional treatments for pregnancy are still relied on by most people, but her.

Besides the bad experience in labor, Lavender also mentioned how she hated her first pregnancy. She was fifteen when she had her first child. She said, "I didn't want to get pregnant at first. I wanted to abort it since I didn't want to have a child when I, myself, was still very young. I wasn't ready to be a mother. My ex-husband also didn't want to have a child, and he agreed with my decision to abort it. But my mother told me to keep my baby, later on she would be the one who looked after him, when he was born." Lavender also emphasized that being pregnant as a teenager was one of the worst experiences she had. However, her thoughts changed when she got pregnant for the

second time during her second marriage. She was happy with her pregnancy and it happened when she was in her 20s.

**Growing Up Quickly.** Experiencing adult life, such as taking over the household responsibility and making a hard life-decision, was an inevitable consequence for the participants to overcome since they were teenagers. These experiences also emerged in the participants' stories. As an example, Oak recognized that marriage has changed her daughter's life, "... getting married early teaches her how to be mature, now she will know how to think independently, and she won't be dependent on her parents anymore."

It is common in the participants' stories that husbands should take over the responsibility of a woman right after the marriage. After that, a woman should be respectful to her husband, as she is his dependent, while she learns her new responsibilities as a wife, such as providing food for the family, taking care of the house, and doing chores. One participant, Alamanda, told story this way, "...getting married is complicated because we have to work. If we're married, we have to cook, wake up early, clean the house; pretty much different when we stay with our parents.... We want to be independent. After living alone with my husband and daughter, now we know how to think wisely. We know how to take everything into consideration."

Other than being a wife, these women also were expected to be an adequate mother after they have a child. When considering a decision, they need to take into account their child's well-being, as Bougenville said, "We were married at a young age, but after having a daughter, we are able to think maturely. Before that we both were like children. For example, if we didn't have money, we never thought about other needs. But now we are more mature than before and understand our responsibilities."

**Experiencing Mood Swings.** Most of the participants acknowledged that they were not psychologically ready to get married at an early age. They described mood swings and emotionally unstable as their mental health problems during their marriage. That happened both to them and their partners. Dandelion said, “Maybe when my husband and I are having mood swings or when we are tired, I shouldn’t talk to him harshly, so the problem won’t be even bigger. I prefer being silent if he is angry. Otherwise, we could fight over something small.”

Lotus experienced a similar issue, but she admitted that it was her that was emotionally unstable. She stated, “I didn’t want to get married sooner because I was still young. I was afraid that he might get jealous easily, since he always got angry whenever he saw my ex-fiancé.... They (parents) told me that I should keep my temper. And I shouldn’t get angry easily at my husband.... sometimes I can’t control my temper, so I forget to make it.” Another participant, like Gardenia explained that she and her husband both have mood swings. She said, “Both of us still have mood swings, too childish. For example, if we have a problem, we tend to run away from it; we’re too scared to face it, so we need alone time. If I think about it now, I think we have to discuss it together, right? But instead, we choose to run away from it.”

As a mother, Maple also noticed that her early-married daughter seemed difficult to be mature enough to handle some problems in her marriage. She said, “In a family, we face a lot of differences. If they have a problem, the husband has to keep his wife calm, but sometimes he doesn’t do it. Young people have their ego. They are mentally weak. From a health perspective, especially for women, their bodies aren’t ready for reproduction.” Therefore, she added, it was her and her husband’s responsibility to help



them overcome the problem. That was one of the reasons she will not let her daughter leave her house although she is married.

### **Discussion**

Early marriage is a real concern in Indonesia, especially in rural areas. The purpose of this study is to examine the lived experiences of Madurese women who were married before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Studying Madurese women who were married early is significant since most of the Madurese ethnic group live in rural areas that account for the highest prevalence of early marriage (Muhith, Fardiansyah, & Saputra, 2018) and have the lowest age at marriage (Jones, 2001). Without an in-depth understanding of their stories, it is easy to blame young women for their “perceived” impulsive decision to get away from school responsibilities and tax society at the end (Bennett, 2014; Knox, 2017). This study attempts to get inside the Madurese community to hear Madurese women who were impacted by early marriage and how they told their stories. Stories they told about their decision to get married early, how they chose their suitable partner and their marital expectations, and how they reacted to unpleasant circumstances like socio-economic struggles. These stories were pieced together to answer the following three questions: (1) Why do young Madurese women get married so early?, (2) How do Madurese women make meanings out of their early marriage?, (3) What are the lived experiences of Madurese women in regard to the consequences of early marriage?

#### **Explaining the Reasons for Early Marriage**

**Marriage for love.** Despite the prevalence of arranged marriage in the community (Erulkar, 2013), some early-married Madurese women believed their marriage was based on love, even though they were betrothed by their parents. Instead of

telling a resentful story of being betrothed since they have little input in the process (Knox, 2017; Sabbe et al., 2015), the women in this study recounted a pattern of a search for happiness and companionship. Happiness and companionship, an observable artifact, perhaps is an expression of a deeper cultural expectation that good girls are supposed to get married before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday or while still young (Rafidah, Emilia, & Wahyuni, 2009; Smith-Hefner, 2005). Therefore, even though some women do not have the choice to marry on their free-will, they are happy to be married anyway since that is what the culture expects of them. Based on the symbolic interaction theory (Blumer, 1969), women in this study interpreted the meaning of arranged marriage in a different light. Because they grew up in a culture that values arranged marriage, they did not see that arranged marriage is a form of oppression imposed upon them by their parents as suggested by others (Knox, 2017; Sabbe et al., 2015). Instead, they believe parents are wiser and can match them with better partners, especially given their impoverished condition.

**Arranged Marriage or Pajhudan.** Marriage is a special rite of passage, and people tend to enter this stage of life with all kinds of reasons. In this study, we found that arranged marriage (*pajhudan*) is one of the factors that kept early marriage prevalently high in the Madurese community (Bawono, Suminar, & Hendriani, 2019). The process of marriage arrangement sometimes begins during pregnancy or prior to the birth of the bride and groom (*Bhāākāl Ekakoāghī*). If both sides of the parents and relatives still want the marriage to go on after birth, the process is continued with the process called *tan-mantan* during the bride's childhood (between 4 -10 years old). The last arrangement process prior to the actual marriage is called *bebakalan*.

This community takes the marriage arrangement seriously, often involved other extended family members or others in the community in the decision-making process. Because of the significance of arranged marriage and collective decision, everybody within the community usually knows who engaged to whom and when they are supposed to be married. This practice has been part of the Madurese culture for generations and children tend to grow up to accept these practices as part of their culture. According to the symbolic interaction theory, the connection between symbols (cultures) and interactions (socialization) is fundamental to understand how humans create and recreate symbolic worlds and how those worlds, in turn, shape human behavior (Blumer, 1969; LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993).

**Marriage for economic benefits.** The last reason for early marriage we found in this community is related to family financial situation. In this Madurese community, having a spouse can be an advantage since the majority of the population work as farmers or laborers. The more family members to work together with at the farm, the more income they would get for the family. Marriages, in this case the early marriages, can be used as the stimulus for young people to learn how to earn money for the new family they build. Since education does not grant them instant money for their families, they choose to work as laborer or farmer instead. Hence, they do not value education as much as working to provide the family.

Additionally, it is a common belief in Madurese community that husband is the head of the family, the leader, and it is his responsibility to be the breadwinner. Parents will no longer have the responsibility to provide their daughter after the marriage, because she will be provided by the husband or the husband's family. Early marriages

could be a way to escape poverty, by reducing family financial burden. Women from poor household, by this cause, more vulnerable to early marriage. Performing early marriage can be beneficial for the women to increase their well-being, since there will be a husband that can provide them financially more than their parents.

Having a partner, especially in the early years, to work in the farm gives many families the advantage to improve the family's financial situation. As such, early marriage is promoted in this community since it helps to improve family financial situation more than it hinders society. Therefore, the high prevalence rate of early marriage in rural communities (Erulkar, 2013), especially in the Madurese community, is expected.

### **Making Sense of Early Marriage**

**Sexual purity.** As part of a communal culture and Muslim community, sexual purity is highly valued in Madurese community. Women who are young and virgin are more attractive to marriage, especially to other esteemed families. They are more likely to be treated with respect, and their parents are more likely to gain face from their chastity. On the other hand, unmarried women who practice premarital sex or get pregnant unintentionally are considered violating religious beliefs (*syariat Islam*) (Kariswati & Hadi, 2017), and they tend to be accused of committing sinful crime. When young women in this community get caught for their premarital sex behavior or getting pregnant while still single, their family, extended family members, and surrounding neighbors tend to suffer from the unbearable shame due to the close-knit community. As such, one way to avoid shame or be the gossip of the community is to arrange young women to marry early or as soon as girls reach a certain age or *baligh* (enter puberty)

(Rachmad, 2017) where their body can perform sexual activity. Since they believe that Islam says Muslims can get married as long as they reach puberty, they assume everyone that reach puberty is ready to get married, regardless how their maturity developed in that age.

However, there is another thing that Islam underlies regarding marriage requirements. Besides *baligh* or biologically ready to perform sexual activities, Islam also requires Muslims to be *aqil*, or have the ability to think maturely and have enough knowledge to determine what is good and what is bad for their own lives when they decide to get married. Different from *baligh* that can easily be measured by the biological change, such as menstruation and breast development for women, *aqil* can hardly determine and it usually relies on the social norms. Since it is based on cultural judgments, the appropriate age to get married in the Muslim community varies. In the Madurese community, it is common to assume that people are mature both psychologically and biologically when they reach puberty. Therefore, people in this community perceive that early marriage is not a problem as long as the actors are biologically mature.

This cultural practice and belief, as well as how society views women's sexual purity, seems to support early marriage. For instance, in Indonesia there is a general moral panic about teenage sexuality where premarital sex is seen as a threat to society (Berliana, Utami, Efendi, & Kurniati, 2018; Harding 2008; Wright-Webster 2010). It is the responsibility of the society to make sure young people perform sexual activities as determined according to accepted social norms. To accommodate the appropriate sexual

practice, which must be done by a married couple, society demands people to be married before they perform any sexual practice, no matter how old they are.

**The importance of marriage or married while still young.** Since early marriage is encouraged in this community, adult women who marry later in their lives are considered as an “expired commodity” (*ta paju lake*) or spinsters that nobody wants to marry or acquire (Susilo, 2017). This label is also given to women who do not obey their parents’ marriage arrangement or those who refuse to accept a proposal from some men. Having labelled as a spinster is rough, not only for the women, but also for the parents and relatives. Therefore, marrying offspring off at an early age, at least when they reach menarche or the first menstruation, (Sakdiyah & Ningsih, 2013) is perceived to be a moral duty, otherwise the family will suffer from social pressure such as gossip or rumor (Bawono & Suryanto, 2019) and even being exiled from the community (Kariswati & Hadi, 2017). To some extent, these entrenched norms, or what Spencer-Oatey (2012) called the taking-for-granted assumptions, may explain why the dominant discourse surrounding the ideal age of marriage differs for each sex (Utomo, 2014). Since having daughters who are married later, especially after 18 years old, is perceived to be less ideal than having sons who are not married, families tend to urge or in many cases arranged girls to marry at an earlier age.

**Familism and the expectation of being a good wife.** In Madurese community, family is very important. When two individuals married, they form an alliance between two extended families. To maintain the alliance between the two extended families the marriage has to be strong and in solidarity. Since the bride and the groom represent the pride of their families, it is crucial for them to maintain their integrity, to do their roles in

the family. Being a good wife or a good husband is one of many ways to uphold the family's names.

The husband, as stated previously, is responsible to provide financially for the family and they are told to work and earn money on their own after getting married. Since in this community the wife is expected to care for the household, women are socialized to be obedient and take care of the house in order to maintain a harmonious family (Mardhatillah, 2014). As they grow up, they have been trained to be a good housewife and arranged to marry good men and good families (Arroisi & Quraisyin, 2015) and raise a happy family based on the goal of marriage that is stated in Islam: *sakinah mawadah warrahmah* or peacefulness, compassion, and full of blessings, since managing the household is their sacred duty (Utomo, 2014) as they learn from society.

Although Islam encourages mutual understanding and equal responsibility of husband and wife, including the process of aiming the family goals, women in some cultures do not have a lot of chance to choose their roles besides maintaining the household. In Madurese community, wives especially who come from poor families are expected to obey and dedicate their lives to serve the husbands who support them financially. Additionally, in cultural level, they also believe that a good wife is someone who cares for the family before her own needs, including her own education or career. Some women in this community do not want to disappoint their parents by refusing the arrange married or fight against their husband, because it is their duty to be a good child and uphold their family name. This is one of the reasons, we suspected, that young girls, especially those in the Madurese community, chose family over education and career.

### **Lived Experiences Related to the Consequences of Early Marriage**

Early marriage causes some prominent effects on Madurese women live, especially those who participated in this study, in some ways. First, it brings health consequences for young women regarding their pregnancy, such as experiencing difficulties during the labor and.

Second, early married women in this community tend to end their studies prematurely. Participation in education for girls drops significantly after their marriage, but it does not happen to their husbands (Rina, Spagnoletti, Bennett, Kermode, & Wilopo, 2018). In addition to this, unemployment rates (for the formal sector) in Indonesia are higher among the rural and urban poor, higher for people with lower education, higher for youth and higher for women (Suryadarma, Suryahadi, & Sumarto, 2005). The finding of this study also reflects how the early married women tend to face a lot more barrier to employments since they get out of school right away because of their marriages and do not possess any skills that will benefits for their carrier.

Third, the decision of putting education aside over a marriage harms young woman as persons and as their roles in the family. Madurese families where the parents were married early tend to have less knowledge in problem solving that causes more conflict in marriage and divorce (Muhith, Fardiansyah, & Saputra, 2018). Madurese early married women in this community also have a lot of problems related to their relationship with husbands. Following the conflict, negative emotions such as anger, feeling uncomfortable, and dissatisfaction, that usually related to financial and communication problems are emerged. In addition to those negative emotions, during adolescent age, young people are more likely to experience mood swings caused by unstable hormonal



development. This biological process would not change easily by putting them into adult roles as married persons.

Moreover, women in this community shared the normative understanding that the purpose of marriage was to have children and that pregnancy should soon follow the marriage (Rina et al., 2018). It means that there is a burden in early married women to have a child right away. Although they are not that ready to overcome some crisis situations, physically and psychologically, many early married women subsequently become mothers as the adolescence age, making them less prepared for motherhood than if they had more life experiences (Erfina, Widyawati, Mckenna, & Reisenhofer, 2019).

### **Implications for Practice and Future Research**

Studying about the lived experience of early marriage in a certain geographical location brings a new perspective that can be more diverse and inclusive. Thus, it is worth noting cultural contexts play a huge part in the quest to understand the live experiences of early marriage in multicultural countries like Indonesia. Since mate selection and marriage is strongly embedded in cultural practices, acknowledging the uniqueness of every culture helps the researchers to obtain a comprehensive knowledge of early marriage. According to Madurese women in this study, their early marriage is considered as a response to variety factors, including the endeavor to achieve happiness, economic benefit, social pressure, and upholding the family name. Future studies need to test these factors with a larger sample size in order to inform better intervention programs and policies.

Although the current study captures insightful women's experiences, it does not include the experiences of young men. More research is needed to include young men's voices as well. They too, do not have choices but to marry early due to the arranged marriage culture. Although previous research has found more disadvantages of early marriage to young women, it does not mean the young men are having a good time in their early married life. Additionally, this study also does not cover anything about the dynamic of early marriage couples and the extended family as well as the shared meaning of marriage that is socialized to the children.

The majority of policies and projects designed by Indonesian government to reduce early marriage focus on the increased access to education (compulsory education) to reduce poverty and increased age of legal marriage to reduce the registered early marriage. The findings of this study support the need for greater nuance in designing interventions and emphasize that addressing early marriage in Indonesia as a multicultural country requires additional alternatives. The interventions should explore responding to the indirect factors motivating young women towards early engagement and marriage, such as addressing the community leaders and encouraging girls to work hard for their future. Young girls need to be encouraged that they always have choices, rather than spreading rumors or gossips about unmarried women or women who want to delay marriage for a better future. This collective awareness could diminish the stigma of delaying marriage and provide young women more opportunities for meaningful and/or productive activities (studying, learning new skills, and building community engagement).

## **Limitations**

This study has some limitations. First, the method of recruiting the participants relied heavily on the participants' capability to speak Bahasa Indonesia, the national language. In this community, only a few people can communicate very well with the language other than the Madurese ethnic group language. Since I come from a different ethnic group and does not speak the Madurese ethnic group language, the interviews were conducted in the national language. This selection might have eliminated potential participants who represent a unique experience of early marriage in the Madurese community. Also, although I used the original transcription for analysis, the coding process was done in English. This would lead some biases in translations.

Next, the participants of the Madurese community in this study tend to be more selective and located in a specific rural area in East Java; therefore, the results cannot be generalized to the whole Madurese community in Indonesia. The culture and values within the Madurese community might be different depend on a variety of factors.

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## Appendix A

*Table 1: Participants' Age, Age of First Marriage, Marital Status, Employment, and Education Level Characteristics*

Characteristics	N	Frequencies	Mean	SD
Daughter	24	80%		
Mother	6	20%		
Age			25.6	8.69
Age of First Married			15.7	2.02
Husband (or ex)'s Age of First Married			20.5	4.13
Marital Status				
Married	25	83.3%		
Divorce	1	3.3%		
Re-married	4	13.3%		
Employment				
Employee	2	6.7%		
Unemployed (housewife)	14	46.7%		
Self-employed (Fish box craftsman)	7	23.3%		
Farmer	7	23.3%		
Education				
Some Primary School	5	16.7%		
Primary School	10	33.3%		
Some Middle School	3	10%		
Middle School	6	20%		
Some High School	2	6.7%		
High School	4	13.3%		

## Appendix B

### The Analysis Tables for the Emerging Themes and Sub-Themes along with the Sample of Quotes

*Table 2*

*RQ 1: Why do young Madurese women get married so early?*

Themes	Subthemes	Sample of quotes	Frequency
<p><b>Reasons for Early Marriage</b> (n=29)</p>	<p>Marriage for love, companionship, and happiness  (n=21)</p>	<p>“Happiness. If I didn’t have my husband, I wouldn’t be happy, so I think it’s better to get married.” - Bougenville (18), Married.</p> <p>We didn’t date back then. We got married, when I was 15 years old... we both love each other. I was happy. ” - Magnolia (22), Married.</p> <p>“I got married because of my own decision. We both love each other.” Poppy (19), Married.</p> <p>“Because of love. If I think about it again, getting married early is hard. I didn’t even finish my study in senior-high school, so it’s hard for me to find a proper job. The point is, love is blind. I didn’t think about it thoroughly before... I am happy because I have someone who looks after me, who always accompanies me. I feel safe to tell everything to my husband.” - Gardenia (19), Married.</p> <p>“We have friends to talk to. I used to be all alone because my parents’ worked in Bali. I used to keep my problem alone, but now I have a friend to share. If I talk to my husband, I feel like my problem is solved. We don’t need to fight over something like my neighbors who split up.” - Amaryllis (20), Married.</p>	<p>72%</p>

		<p>“If I didn’t marry, I wouldn’t have company.” - Palmtree (40), Remarried.</p>	
	<p>Arranged Married (n=10)</p>	<p>“At first, I didn’t know my husband. I just knew him once we got engaged. Two months later, we got married. I used to dislike him since he was my parents’ choice. I used to be afraid of my husband.” - Teaktree (40), Married.</p> <p>“I was betrothed to him by my parents when I was still in sixth grade in elementary school. Of course, I was shocked. Three months later, we got married. I was afraid I might not be able to eat and work properly.” - Sandalwood (38), Married.</p> <p>“We had been betrothed by our parents since I was 8 or 9 years old. After graduating from elementary school, we got married. I was betrothed when I was still young, so I felt I wasn’t ready. However, my parents convinced me to continue our engagement. I became interested in him since then.” Crysant (24), Married.</p>	<p>34%</p>
	<p>Community Pressure (n=7)</p>	<p>“They said I’d rather get married than being talked about by my neighbors. After seven months of engagement, we got married. Actually, both of us didn’t want to get married too soon, but since our parents were afraid that our neighbors might spread rumors about us, we eventually got married.” - Dandelion (18), Married.</p> <p>“So actually, at that time I still wanted her to study in senior high before getting married. However, her husband’s family insisted on holding the marriage sooner. However, since her husband’s family insisted, I had no other choice.” - Oak (44), Married.</p>	<p>24%</p>

		<p>“Here the neighbors love gossiping, and most of the time, people who stay single being talked about, ‘She hasn’t got engaged at that age, what if someone comes to her house. Such a vamp.’ So when I got married I felt relaxed and peaceful. No one would ever bother me again.”- Alamanda (25), Married.</p>	
	<p>Marriage for economic benefits (n=8)</p>	<p>“After my first husband died, I married again right away because I needed someone to work together with me.” Palmtree (40), Remarried.</p> <p>“When I was a child, I was so poor and it was difficult to afford enough food to eat.. But since I have a husband, we can earn money for our needs. My life becomes prosperous.” - Sandalwood (38), Married.</p> <p>“If my family was well-off and I had given a chance to choose, I think I would still continue my study. However, it was difficult to earn money at that time and I believe once I got married, I would share the cost of living together with my husband. I am happy. It’s better than before. In the past if I wanted something I had to keep it by myself, but now my husband helps me earn it. For example, our house and field. Thank God, even though our house is not as good as anyone else’s houses, it’s enough to make me happy.” - Chrysant (24), Married.</p> <p>We can take care of each other. For example, if you are married, you can work and you can earn more money. You can ask for money from your husband because he’s no longer asking for money from his parents.” - Buttercup (22), Married.</p> <p>“I am very grateful that my husband is a good man. After having a daughter, we are able to get more income. It’s always enough to cover up our daily needs. Although we</p>	<p>28%</p>

		are still living together with our parents, he still works hard and is able to give money to his wife and child.” - Bougenville (18), Married.	
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Table 3

RQ 2: How do Madurese women make meanings out of their early marriage? (n=30)

Themes	Subthemes	Sample of quotes	Frequency
Social norms and value that are perpetuating early marriage in the Madurese community	Sexual Purity	<p>“The same cases (getting pregnant before marriage) also happened to a lot of her friends in junior high school. A woman is like a pearl or diamond, pretty and beautiful, but only one crack (because she loses her virginity) can make it worthless. That’s why, as parents not only have to pray for our children but also give a big effort to protect them, even though I am aware that sometimes I might be negligent towards them.” - Maple (48), Married.</p> <p>“So besides going to school, I just stay at home. Even though I was still in 6th grade of elementary school, they already assumed I was mature. I had to be more careful if I wanted to hang out with my friends. My neighbors will start making rumors if I hang out with someone else but my fiance... we (she and fiance) were allowed to hang out together, but we were prohibited to hang out at night or else our neighbors will start making rumors.” - Dandelion (18), Married.</p> <p>“If we are old enough, we were not allowed to go outside with any men because it might stir false rumors. But if we’re married then we’re free from those rumors.” - Sandalwood (38), Married.</p> <p>“People might blame them if they left their house. People would assume they were naughty since they didn’t have a spouse. Even if they have a spouse, they should go outside with their spouse, or else, people might blame</p>	53%

		them for leaving their house all alone.” - Bougenville (18), Married.	
	The Importance of Marriage	<p>“They’re okay with it. On the contrary, they will gossip about every woman who was still single. They might as well gossip about me, since I used to run away. Even my sister who went out for one day to her boyfriend's house got her own gossip, let alone myself.” - Bougenville (18), married.</p> <p>“Any woman who stays single will be called a spinster here. But once we’re married, we will have someone who protects us.” - Sandalwood (38), Married.</p> <p>“Here, people look at their appearances. If physically they look big enough, then they will be expected to be married, even though they are still young. The neighbors will be super chatty to someone who hasn’t got married.”- Lavender (28), Remarried.</p> <p>Before I got married, even my aunt kept mocking me. She said, a ‘big’ girl should be married. While in fact, I was still in seventh grade. Even my father was being hostile because I didn’t want to marry any men.- Amaryllis (20), Married.</p>	53%
<b>Expectations of being a wife (n=29)</b>	Obedient to husband (n=13)	<p>“She has to do what her husband wants her to do. For example if he asks her to buy a pack of cigarettes, she has to do it. She has to be obedient.” - Sandalwood (38), Married.</p> <p>“They said I should obey my husband. I shouldn’t fight with him. I have to be an obedient wife.” Dahlia (18), Married.</p>	45%

		<p>“Always obey her husband. Always be patient and never get angry easily. I have to obey whatever my husband asks for.” - Alamanda (25), Married.</p> <p>“I should be a good wife who is obedient to her husband. I shouldn’t act like a child anymore. I am a mother now so I have to act and think maturely.- Aster (21), Married.</p>	
	Serving and providing for husband (n=13)	<p>“If my husband comes back from work, I have to make a cup of coffee, prepare his clothes. And after taking a bath, I have to prepare dinner... when my husband is going to work, I have to make him a cup of coffee or breakfast.” - Dandelion (18), Married.</p> <p>“She has to be kind and knows how to look after her husband. For example, if my husband just went back from work, I had to make a cup of tea for him.” - Lotus (23), Married.</p> <p>She has to take care of her husband, prepare food, if he comes home from work, the wife is supposed to be at home.- Sandalwood (38), Married.</p>	45%
	Maintaining family harmony (n=19)	<p>“I told her, once she got married, she had to get along well with her husband, she should make a harmonious family. They get along well and never have arguments. I think they don’t face any problem in their marriage.” - Oak (44), Married.</p> <p>“My mother asked to never fight with my husband. We have to get along well. My parents have high blood pressure, so I have to get along well</p>	66%

		<p>with my husband.” - Sunflower (20), Married.</p> <p>“Of course we wish to be a good and blessed family <i>sakinah, mawadah, warahmah</i>. My mother told me to follow Ibu Fadil as an example. She never fights with her husband and her parents. My mother also told me, I shouldn’t fight with my husband, don’t let our neighbors overhear our problem.” - Alamanda (25), married.</p>	
	<p>Controlling jealousy (n=7)</p>	<p>“We’re both grateful because there used to be some people who wanted to break our engagement. In the past, my husband was seduced by someone else. But I said nothing, I didn't even tell my parents because I was afraid it might become a big problem between us. But now he always thanks me for being patient even though he hurt me. Now he is faithful to me.” - Dandelion (18), Married.</p> <p>“They told me to always be loyal and faithful to my husband. I think we need to believe in each other more. Since he has a lot of schedules outside and I have to stay at home, sometimes I hear some rumors going around in the neighborhood. I am a jealous type. Moreover, my husband has a lot of exes living in this neighborhood. Actually, I befriend them all. When one of them comes to our home, my husband chooses to leave just in case he might remember his past with her. Fortunately, my husband is not a jealousy type, he didn’t restrict me. He even asked me to tell him if he or the in laws ever treat me badly. So I am allowed to go wherever I want to go, as long as I am accompanied by someone</p>	<p>24%</p>

		<p>he knows well.” - Gardenia (18), Married.</p> <p>“Sometimes I am afraid that my husband is being seduced by some girls. I want to improve the harmony in this family. I think getting married is not all about money, we have to care and love each other. My husband works from early morning until evening. So I get worried easily when he goes to Taman Kursi. The women who live in that village love to wear sultry outfits.” - Alamanda (25), Married.</p>	
Gender inequality and Expectation (n=20)	Girl vs. Boy (N=13)	<p>“Men are free to choose what’s good for them. At least they should marry by the age of 20. It's different from women; they want to get married as soon as possible, while men can have time before they get married later.” - Teaktree (40), Married.</p> <p>“Parents are also afraid that their daughter might get pregnant before finishing their study. It’s harder to have a daughter than to have a son.” - Randhu (35), Married.</p> <p>“I am afraid she might be harassed by men. Since graduating from elementary school they are not supposed to go anywhere freely. They (men) are free to go and continue their study. Boys can ride their motorbike and go to school... Men are free to harass any girls. It's okay (for men to impregnate women), but he needs to take responsibility by marrying her.” - Teaktree</p>	65%
	Need a husband for Protection (N=7)	<p>“Once I had a baby, I was allowed to go outside. Before that, I wasn’t as my parents said there might be someone who assaulted me. There used to be a</p>	35%

		<p>man from Kalirejo who liked me, but he had already married and split up with his wife. He was rude. That's why my father forbid me to go outside. Back then, there was also a man named Samsul who put a black magic on me. He was my Ustad in Madrasah. He made me like him, but my father disapproved that he even threatened to kill Samsul if I kept liking him." Lotus (23), Married.</p> <p>"Since I was in the sixth grade of elementary school, I was prohibited to go outside. The only things I did when I went outside were going to school and <i>ngaji</i> (reciting Qur'an). Just that. I got home from school at four PM and then I went to <i>musala</i> for <i>ngaji</i> at five. Hence I was not able to go anywhere else." - Sunflower (20), Married.</p>	
	<p>Fear of premarital sex and unintended pregnancy for young women (N=9)</p>	<p>"I'm just afraid that they might get pregnant before they get married. So to prevent that, I'd rather marry them first." - Tektree (40), Married.</p> <p>"If women were not married early, it would be so hard for them to get someone to marry. Also, it is better to get married early than to get pregnant out of wedlock." - Palmtree (40), remarried.</p> <p>"The benefit is probably they will be able to detain their behaviors which contradict their religious thoughts (<i>zina</i>). They don't do it now, unless it was by accident (unexpected pregnancy)." - Maple (48), Married.</p> <p>"I got worried easily when my daughter hung out with her friends since I didn't know where she went to. I was afraid she might get pregnant, but once she</p>	<p>45%</p>

		got married, I feel at ease now.” Sandalwood (38), Married.	
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Table 3

RQ 3: What are the lived experiences of Madurese women in regard to the consequences of early marriage? (n=28)

Themes	Sample of quotes	Frequency
<p>School and Job Prospects: Dropped out from school and difficulty in entering the workplace (n=13)</p>	<p>“Now I already have a daughter. In the past, I didn’t have enough money to continue my studies. But the desire is still there. I used to cry whenever I looked at my classmates. I still want to continue my studies, but my parents have no money.” - Bougenville (18), Married.</p> <p>“Since seventh grade I studied hard to get good grades so that I could go to a senior high school that I dreamed of. But it turned out like this (dropped out and married early).” - Dandelion (18) Married.</p> <p>“I wanted to study, but my parents asked me to get married instead, because at that time, my husband had stopped studying too.” Alamanda (25), Married.</p> <p>“If I think about it again, getting married early is hard. I didn’t even finish my study in senior-high school, so it’s hard for me to find a proper job. Graduating from senior-high school is better than graduating only from junior-high. I personally wish to continue my study until university, but because of our family financial problem, I couldn’t even finish my senior-high.” - Gardenia (18), Married.</p>	46%
<p>Mental health: Mood Swings (n=7)</p>	<p>“I didn’t want to get married sooner because I was still young. I was afraid that he might get jealous easily, since he always got angry whenever he saw my ex fiancé.... They (parents) told me that I should keep my temper. And I shouldn’t get angry easily at my husband.... sometimes I can’t control my temper, so I forget to make it” - Lotus (23), Married.</p> <p>“In a family, we face a lot of differences. If they have a problem, the husband has to keep his wife calm, but sometimes he doesn’t do it. Young people have their ego. They are mentally weak. From a health perspective, especially for women, their bodies aren’t ready for reproduction.” - Maple (48), Married.</p>	25%



	<p>“Both of us still have mood swings, too childish. For example if we have a problem, we tend to run away from it, we’re too scared to face it, so we need alone time. If I think about it now, I think we have to discuss it together, right? But instead, we choose to run away from it.” Gardenia (18), Married.</p>	
<p>Decisions to Have Children (n=13)</p>	<p>“I got married before the age of 18 and it was hard during pregnancy. I gave birth in Situbondo (the nearest city, but far away from her house) because I was not able to push. It makes me don’t want to have a baby anymore.” - Lotus (23), Married.</p> <p>“I didn’t want to get pregnant at first. I wanted to abort it since I didn’t want to have a child when I, myself, was still very young. I wasn’t ready to be a mother. My ex-husband also didn’t want to have a child, and he agreed with my decision to abort it. But, my mother told me to keep my baby, later on she would be the one who looked after him, when he was born.” - Lavender (28), Married.</p>	46%
<p>Maturity Levels: Pushed Them to Grow Quickly (n=11)</p>	<p>“She will have a husband so she won’t burden her parents. Now, she becomes her husband's responsibility. Besides, getting married early teaches her how to be mature, now she will know how to think independently, and she won’t be dependent on her parents anymore.” - Oak (44), Married.</p> <p>“She has other responsibilities once she gets married. I said to my daughter to be responsible once she gets married. The life before and after marriage are different.” - Sandalwood (38), Married.</p> <p>“We were married at a young age, but after having a daughter, we are able to think maturely. Before that we both were like children. For example, if we didn't have money, we never thought about other needs. But now we are more mature than before and understand our responsibilities.” - Bougenville (18), Married.</p> <p>“...getting married is complicated because we have to work. If we’re married we have to cook, wake up early, clean the house; pretty much different when we stay with our parents.... We want to be independent. After living alone with my husband and daughter, now we</p>	39%

	know how to think wisely. We know how to take everything into consideration. “ - Alamanda (25), Married.	
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## Appendix C

Table of the Code Book for the important key terms of the interviews

No	Participant	Early-Marriage Experience						
		Why get married?	What you get from early marriage?		How is a good wife supposed to be?	How do you see your marriage?	how do you see your Mother/daughter marriage	Childbirth/pr egnancy Experience
			Positive	Negative				
1	Teaktree	Betrothed			Prepare husband's breakfast or warm water	Proud of her children. Wants to build a better house.	happy. Noticed if there were a problem. Biggest problem is finance.	Told daughters not to get pregnant right away but they insisted.
2	Bougenville	To search happiness. People would not blame her if she left their house.	have someone who take care of her. Economic benefits Think more maturely more responsible independent from parents	could not continue study	take care family members, cook	Her husband is responsible, enough money for daughter	Happy. No fight. Help each other financially, get along. Support each other.	She was afraid. she was only 14 when she was pregnant. Mother helped her.

Arranged-Marriage Experience				Cultural Value and Social Norm Regarding Early Marriage	
Decision Making		Reasons	Feeling about it	Do it to daughter?	
Forced	Willingly				
she was forced, and dislike her husband		Her parent was afraid if no one wanted to be her spouse. She prefers her daughter marry a person who lives nearby and she already know the parents.	Afraid of his husband	Yes	Afraid daughter pregnant out of wedlock if she did not married early. Afraid they might being harassed by men, the daughters were not allowed to go anywhere freely. But sons can do whatever they want.
She was betrothed, but insist to marry man her own choice, running away with him.			did not like the fiance, hate him	N/A	Boys are rarely got engaged. People afraid girls will be spinsters and no one wants to be with them. But, there is no such as old bachelor. Women are not supposed to be leaving their house all alone without spouse. Neighborhood supports early-marriage. Single women will be gossiped, but single men wont. It is the woman's fault if there is a man wants to hang out with her.

## Appendix D

### The Notification Letter

Dear Mr./Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_,

I am writing this letter to follow up on the announcement made by your informal community leader (Ketua RT) a few days ago. My name is Cahya Haniva Yunizar, and I am a resident of \_\_\_\_\_. I grew up in \_\_\_\_\_ and finished my undergraduate education in \_\_\_\_\_ (year). Currently, I study at the University of Minnesota, U.S.A for my master's degree, and my thesis focuses on marriage and early marriage.

I am looking for parents who have at least one daughter married before the age of 18 and young adults 25 years old or younger who were married before the age of 18 to share their lived experiences and their understanding of what it means to be married. Specifically, we will ask a series of open-ended questions about your family background, your understanding of the meaning of marriage, your marriage experiences, your parent-child relationships, and your relationship with your spouse. The interview will take no longer than two hours, and I can come to your home to conduct the interview. If you agree to help me and share your experiences, I will provide \$10 (approximately Rp150,000) in cash for each person as my token of appreciation.

If you have any question about the interview, please do not hesitate to contact me directly at (contact information) or contact your Ketua RT. I would be much appreciated if you can check the appropriate box below to indicate whether or not you would like to be part of the interview. Please return this form to your Ketua RT and s/he will inform me about your decision.

Once again, thank you in advance for your willingness to assist me in my master's thesis research.

Sincerely,

Cahya Haniva Yunizar  
 Graduate Student  
 Department of Family Social Science  
 University of Minnesota  
 085 755 827 627  
 yuniz001@umn.edu

*Please fill out the portion below and return it to your Ketua RT.*

Your name:

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Your Address:

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**YES**, I would like to sign up for the interview.

Please contact me at \_\_\_\_\_  
*Phone Number*

**NO**, Please DO NOT contact me.

## Appendix E

### Interview Questions for Parents

#### Demographic questions

First Name :  
 Current age :  
 Spouse current age :  
 Highest education :  
 Spouse highest education :  
 Age of first married :  
 Age of spouse when first married:  
 Number of children :  
 Occupation :  
 Spouse's occupation :  
 Sex : Female / Male  
 Marital status : Married / divorced / widowed  
 Who she/he lives with :  
 City of residence :

#### Interview Questions - Parents

1. Can you tell me a little bit about your children?
  - a. How many do you have?
  - b. How many boys and how many girls?
  - c. How many are married already?
  - d. Of the married children, how many of them married before the age of 18?
2. As a married person, what is the meaning of marriage?
  - a. Why do people get married?
  - b. For what reasons or purpose?
  - c. What does a person gain if he or she is married?
  - d. What does a person lose if he or she stay single?
  - e. Who made the final decision? Why?
  - f. What about your marriage? Can you tell me a little bit about your marriage?
  - g. How did you meet your spouse? When did you decide to get married? At what age? What went through your mind?
3. What do you think about getting married before the age of 18?
  - a. What is good about it or what are the benefits?
  - b. What is bad about it or what are the disadvantages?
  - c. Do you have any experiences to share?
  - d. What are your recommendations for young women?
4. Have you ever talked about marriage life with your children? If so, when? How did you do that? If no, why?
5. Have you ever given your daughter an example or provide a role model that reflect how marriage life is supposed to be? Can you give me an example? How does a good marriage look like? How does a good wife and mother supposed to be? Did you tell your daughter about these?

6. What do you think about your own marriage? What are the things in your marriage that you proud of? Is there something in your marriage that you need to improve?
7. How much do you share your feelings with your children, especially about your relationship with your spouse? Do you tell your children if you have a problem with your spouse? In your point of view, how does she perceive about your marriage?
8. What do you think about your daughter's marriage? Do you think she is happy now? If yes, can you tell me more? Can you give me an example?
9. Do you think she is doing well in her marriage? What is the hardest problem she struggles from? How she overcome that problem? Does that problem have something to do with the early marriage?
10. Did you involve in her decision-making process to determine whether she should marry early? If so, how? Why? What suggestions about marriage did you give to your daughter before she got married and during her marriage?
11. Does your daughter share her marriage problem with you? If she has problem, does she ask your assistance to solve it? To what extent both of you share your own household problem?
12. Have you ever talked about dating and what to expect when she's in a relationship? Have you ever given her examples of the difficulties of being married like how to deal with pregnancy and bearing children?
13. What do you think about the reaction of the community or neighborhood towards early marriage? Do they support that? Have you gotten any socialization about marriage planning, marital problem solving, and the other socialization from community or governmental agency?

## Interview Questions – Married Daughter

First Name :  
 Current age :  
 Spouse current age :  
 Highest education :  
 Spouse highest education :  
 Age of first married :  
 Age of spouse when first married:  
 Number of children :  
 Occupation :  
 Spouse's occupation :  
 Sex : Female / Male  
 Marital status : Married / divorced / widowed  
 Who she lives with :  
 City of residence :

### Interview Questions

1. Do you have any children?
2. If yes, can you tell me a little bit about your children?
  - a. How many do you have?
  - b. How many boys and how many girls?
3. As a married person, what is the meaning of marriage?
  - a. Why do people get married?
  - b. For what reasons or purpose?
  - c. What does a person gain if he or she is married?
  - d. What does a person lose if he or she stay single?
  - e. Who made the final decision? Why?
  - f. What about your marriage? Can you tell me a little bit about your marriage?
  - g. How did you meet your spouse? When did you decide to get married? At what age? What went through your mind?
4. What do you think about getting married before the age of 18?
  - a. What is good about it or what are the benefits?
  - b. What is bad about it or what are the disadvantages?
  - c. Do you have any experiences to share?
  - d. What are your recommendations for young women?
5. Have you ever talked about a marriage life with your parent? If so, when? How they talk to you about that? If no, have you ever asked about that to your parent?
6. Have your parents ever talk about or give you an example or provide a role model that reflect how marriage live supposed to be? How does a good marriage look like in their opinion? How does a good wife and mother supposed to be, based on your parents' point of view? Are you agree with them? Or, do you have another role model?
7. What do you think about your parent's marriage? Do you think they are happy now? Do you think they are doing well in their marriage? Do you know what



is the hardest problem they struggle from? How do they overcome that problem?

8. Did you involve your parent in your decision-making process to determine whether you should marry early? What suggestions did they give to you before you get married and during your marriage?
9. How much do you share your feelings with your parents, especially about your relationship with your spouse? Do you tell your parents if you have a problem with your spouse? In your point of view, how do they perceive about your marriage?
10. What do you think about your own marriage? What are the things in your marriage that you proud of? Is there something in your marriage that you need to improve?
11. Do you share your marriage problem with your parents? Did you ask your parent's assistance to solve it? To what extent both of you share your own household problem? In your point of view, does that problem have something to do with the early marriage?
12. Have you ever talked about dating with your parents and what to expect when you are in a relationship? Have you ever been given an examples of the difficulties of being married like how to deal with pregnancy and bearing children? If you can do it yourself, how did you find a way? Did you see how your parent was dealing with you or your siblings in the past?
13. What do you think about the reaction of the community or neighborhood towards early marriage? Do they support that? Have you got any socialization about marriage planning, marital problem solving, and the other socialization from community or government agent?