

The Effectiveness of Government Policies on the Prevention of Early Marriage in South Bolaang Mongondow Regency

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of the South Bolaang Mongondow Regency Government's policies on the prevention of early marriage. The problem of child marriage is still a crucial issue in Indonesia because it has an impact on the quality of human resources, education, and the health of the younger generation. South Bolaang Mongondow Regency (Bolsel) has demographic characteristics that show that around 24.4% of the population is 0–14 years old out of a total of 75,374 people, so it has a high potential risk to the practice of early marriage. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with two problem formulations, namely: (1) how to form and implement government policies in preventing early marriage, and (2) how effective these policies are in reducing the practice of child marriage in the community. The results of the study show that the local government through the Office of Population Control, Family Planning, Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (PPKBP3A) has implemented socialization, education, and cross-sector collaboration programs in an effort to prevent early marriage, such as counseling activities in Pintadia Village, Bolaang Uki District in June 2025. This policy shows a positive direction because it increases public awareness about the dangers of child marriage, but its effectiveness is not optimal. Factors that hinder include lack of coordination between agencies, budget limitations, lack of integrated data, and strong family cultural and economic influence.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Early marriage, which is legally defined as marriage that occurs before reaching the minimum age set by laws and regulations, is a social phenomenon that has a multi-dimensional impact on human rights, reproductive health, educational sustainability, and the economic conditions of families and communities; This problem not only touches the realm of individual women or men who marry young, but also affects the quality of human resource development on a macro basis because children who marry early tend to face the risk of dropping out of school, pregnancy complications, and limited economic opportunities which then cause a cycle of poverty between generations. In addition, child marriage is often closely linked to structural determinants such as poverty, low access to secondary education, discriminatory gender norms, and weak cross-sector coordination in child protection, so prevention efforts require comprehensive, integrated, and evidence-based public policies.

At the national level, legal and policy instruments have established minimum age limits for marriage and mandated measures to prevent child marriage, but implementation at the local level shows wide variations in effects due to differences in local government capacity, socio-cultural conditions, and the availability of accurate data for intervention planning; Therefore, the effectiveness of prevention policies is highly dependent on contextual implementation, strengthening the capacity of regional apparatus, and the involvement of local actors such as religious leaders, traditional leaders, schools, and community institutions.

The demographic context of South Bolaang Mongondow Regency shows the urgency of such an intervention, as the region has a relatively large proportion of children who have the potential to be vulnerable to early marriage: official data shows that by 2024 around 24.4 percent of the population of Bolsel will be in the age group of 0–14 years, which indicates that there is a significant population base of children and adolescents and in need of protection and education and health services adequate so as not to be pushed into premature marriage. Furthermore, the total population of Bolsel in 2024 is recorded at 75,374 people, so the absolute proportion of these children is not only a percentage figure but also means thousands of individuals who are prone to be affected by local social and economic determinants. The proportion of productive age (15-59 years) which reaches around 66.89 percent and the elderly group around 8.7 percent also indicates a dependency structure that must be responded to through effective family policies and child protection so that the socio-economic burden does not trigger the resolution of family problems through early marriage options.

Responding to these challenges, the Bolsel Regency Government through related agencies has begun to carry out prevention programs, for example the implementation of socialization activities to prevent early childhood marriage organized by the Population Control, Family Planning, Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (PPKBP3A) Office in Pintadia Village, Bolaang Uki District on June 25, 2025; This activity shows an institutional commitment to increase public awareness of the negative impact of child marriage and link preventive interventions with other issues such as efforts to reduce stunting rates and strengthen child protection. However, the commitment of socialization activities alone is not enough as a benchmark for policy effectiveness because effectiveness requires measurable results: a decrease in the prevalence of early marriage, an increase in the average age of first marriage, a decrease in the rate of school dropouts due to marriage, and changes in attitudes and social practices at the community level.

In practice, there are several real obstacles that threaten the effectiveness of prevention policies in Bolsel, including cultural factors that maintain the practice of early marriage as an economic or social solution, limited access to secondary education and job opportunities for adolescents, especially women, so that marriage is seen as a way out, as well as inter-agency coordination that is not fully synergistic between the agency, village officials, schools, religious organizations, and customary institutions that have a strong influence on local norms; Administrative conditions at the sub-district and village levels also often show limited valid data on child marriage rates, making evidence-based planning difficult.

Against this background, this study focuses on the effectiveness of the Bolsel Regency government policies in preventing early marriage, namely whether the policies and programs implemented have produced real outcomes in the field and the long-term impact on the decline of child marriage practices; The study also aims to identify structural, cultural, and administrative barriers that hinder the achievement of policy objectives and formulate policy recommendations that are more integrated, oriented towards the protection of children's rights and the economic empowerment of adolescents, and supported by a data-based monitoring-evaluation system that is able to ensure the

sustainability of interventions. This kind of study is important because the success of preventing early marriage is not just a statistical reduction, but a long-term investment in the quality of life of future generations and the achievement of human development goals at the local level.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This type of research is empirical research, which is research with field data as the main source of data, such as interviews and observations. Empirical research is used to analyze the law which is seen as a patterned community behavior in the lives of people who are always interacting and related in social aspects. Empirical legal research is legal research on the enactment or implementation of normative legal provisions in action on every specific legal event that occurs in society.

3. RESULTS OF RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

a. The form and implementation of the South Bolaang Mongondow Regency Government policy in an effort to prevent early marriage

Local government policies are an important instrument in tackling complex social problems, including cases of early marriage. In Indonesia, this issue is a serious concern because it has a direct impact on the quality of human resources, poverty rates, and maternal and child health. Nationally, the results of the 2023 National Socio-Economic Survey (Susenas) show that around 8.7% of women aged 20–24 years old marry before the age of 18, which means that it is still far from the national target to reduce the child marriage rate to below 5%.

South Bolaang Mongondow Regency (Bolsel) as part of North Sulawesi Province, has demographic and social characteristics that make this issue very relevant. Based on data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in 2024, Bolsel has a population of around 75,374 people, with 24.4% of them aged 0–14 years, indicating that almost a quarter of the population is still in the category of children and adolescents. This figure signals that the potential risk of child marriage is still quite high, especially if it is not balanced with adequate access to education and strong social supervision.

In order to answer these challenges, the Bolsel Regency Government through the Population Control, Family Planning, Women's Empowerment, and Child Protection (PPKBP3A) Office has initiated various strategic steps. One form of implementation is the implementation of socialization and education programs about the dangers of early marriage in various sub-districts, including activities in Pintadia Village, Bolaang Uki District, on June 25, 2025, which was attended by village officials, community leaders, teachers, and students. This activity aims to instill an understanding that child marriage is at risk of causing various problems, such as stunting, school dropouts, structural poverty, and domestic violence (KDRT).

In addition to socialization, the Bolsel government's policy is also carried out through the approach of family planning (KB) programs and adolescent education, by collaborating with religious institutions and schools. The government emphasized the importance of sexual education and reproductive health in the secondary school curriculum, as well as increasing the role of family planning counselors in providing information on the readiness of the ideal marriage age. This effort shows that the policy to prevent early marriage in Bolsel has been directed holistically and intersectorally.

However, the effectiveness of the implementation of this policy is not fully optimal. Based on the results of interviews with several village officials and official employees, it was found that socialization has not been carried out continuously and is still ceremonial, not all villages have a routine agenda in preventing child marriage, and

coordination between agencies is still weak. Some religious leaders have not even been fully involved in socialization activities, even though they have a big role in determining people's views on early marriage.

Another factor is the limited budget and human resources (HR) at the district level. The Bolsel PPKBP3A Office still has a limited number of extension workers, while the Bolsel administrative area consists of 7 sub-districts and dozens of villages with geographical conditions that are not all easy to reach. This condition causes policy messages to not reach all communities equally.

In addition to structural constraints, cultural factors also affect policy implementation. In some cases, people in rural areas still consider child marriage as a way out of promiscuity or family economic conditions. This view is rooted in social values that consider that women who have been dating for a long time need to get married immediately so that they do not become the subject of public discussion. This factor is a big challenge for the government in fostering public awareness that child marriage actually prolongs the cycle of poverty and educational underdevelopment.

Thus, it can be concluded that the policy to prevent early marriage in Bolsel has been running in the right direction, but its effectiveness is still limited due to the lack of coordination between institutions, lack of accurate data on child marriage, and strong cultural influences. There needs to be synergy between local governments, religious institutions, schools, and civil society organizations so that the implementation of policies can run more measurably and sustainably.

b. The effectiveness of the policy in reducing the practice of early marriage in the community of South Bolaang Mongondow Regency

The effectiveness of public policy can be measured through several dimensions such as public understanding of policies, technical implementation, behavioral changes, and the achievement of policy goals. In the context of the policy to prevent early marriage in Bolsel, its effectiveness can be assessed from three aspects: (1) the extent to which the policy is implemented consistently, (2) the extent to which the community understands and accepts the policy message, and (3) how much of a decrease in the rate of early marriage occurs after the policy is enacted.

Based on the results of observations and interviews, the implementation of the policy in Bolsel shows that there is an increase in public awareness of the dangers of early marriage. People are beginning to understand that child marriage has long-term consequences, both physically, psychologically, and socially. In some sub-districts such as Bolaang Uki and Pinolosian, parents are starting to be more cautious in allowing their children to marry before the age of 19.

However, based on the internal report of the PPKBP3A Office in 2024, there are still several cases of marriage dispensation applications at the Religious Court submitted by the community due to pregnancy or social pressure. This shows that existing policies have only succeeded in changing the perception of some people, but have not been fully effective in changing social behavior at large.

If using the theory of public policy effectiveness according to William N. Dunn (2018), effectiveness is measured from the relationship between the desired outcome and the desired outcome achieved. In this case, the desired result of the Bolsel government is a significant reduction in the rate of early marriage, while the results achieved are in the form of increasing awareness and cross-sectoral policy formulation. This means that the effectiveness is only at the level of moderate outcomes, not yet reaching maximum results.

The causative factors include weak policy supervision and evaluation. Not all socialization activities are reported systematically, and there is no digital database that records children at risk of early marriage. In addition, the involvement of educational institutions is still sporadic, so policy messages are not firmly embedded among adolescents. In fact, school is the most strategic place to instill values about the importance of delaying the age of marriage.

In addition to institutional factors, household economic conditions and access to education also affect the effectiveness of policies. In some remote villages, many girls do not continue their education to high school due to limited costs and long school distances. This condition increases the possibility of these children marrying young because they are considered to have no productive activities.

Nevertheless, it should be acknowledged that the policy of preventing early marriage in Bolsel has had a positive social impact. Socialization activities create a space for dialogue between the government, the community, and religious leaders. The government has also begun to prepare advanced programs in the form of creative economy training for young women so that they have productive activities and are not tempted to marry early.

Therefore, the effectiveness of policies can be said to be starting to show positive results even though they are not optimal. Further steps are needed in the form of (1) increasing the intensity of socialization in all sub-districts, (2) strengthening cross-sector coordination, (3) economic empowerment of poor families, (4) expanding access to secondary education for girls, and (5) developing an integrated data system on children at risk of early marriage. With these measures, the Bolsel local government policy has the potential to become an effective model in preventing early marriage at the district level.

4. CONCLUSION

The South Bolaang Mongondow Regency Government's policy on the prevention of early marriage has shown a progressive and child protection orientation, but its effectiveness is still limited. Socialization and education programs have been carried out, but they have not been followed by a strong evaluation and supervision system. Therefore, to increase effectiveness, there needs to be cross-sectoral policy synergy, budget support, and active participation of communities and religious institutions.

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