

## Socio-Emotional Development of Women Who Are Pregnant Out of Wedlock

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**Abstract.** Early marriage under age 19 in East Nusa Tenggara remains high, driven by low education, child-rearing practices, and economic vulnerability. This study aims to describe and analyze the socio-emotional development of women who have committed to early marriage due to out-of-wedlock pregnancy in Kupang City. This study uses a qualitative, descriptive approach. The informants consisted of five women who had an out-of-wedlock pregnancy and were married under the age of 19. The results of the study showed that women who experienced early marriage due to out-of-wedlock pregnancies faced emotional challenges in the form of shame, social rejection, and psychological pressure from the surrounding environment. However, family support and self-acceptance are essential factors that can strengthen their emotional resilience. This research emphasizes the importance of the role of social support in assisting women who experience this condition and the urgency of preventing early marriage through education and policy interventions.

**Keywords:** *Early Marriage, Pregnancy Out of Wedlock, Social-Emotional Development, Women*

**Abstrak.** Pernikahan dini di bawah usia 19 tahun di Nusa Tenggara Timur masih tinggi, dipengaruhi oleh rendahnya pendidikan, pola pengasuhan anak, dan kerentanan ekonomi. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menggambarkan dan menganalisis perkembangan sosial emosional wanita yang melakukan pernikahan dini akibat kehamilan di luar nikah di Kota Kupang. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode deskriptif. Informan terdiri dari lima wanita yang mengalami kehamilan di luar nikah dan menikah di usia di bawah 19 tahun. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa wanita yang mengalami pernikahan dini akibat kehamilan di luar nikah menghadapi tantangan emosional berupa rasa malu, penolakan sosial, dan tekanan psikologis dari lingkungan sekitar. Namun, dukungan keluarga dan penerimaan diri menjadi faktor penting yang dapat memperkuat ketahanan emosional mereka. Penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya peran dukungan sosial dalam mendampingi wanita yang mengalami kondisi ini serta urgensi pencegahan pernikahan dini melalui edukasi dan intervensi kebijakan.

**Kata kunci:** *Pernikahan Dini, Kehamilan di luar Nikah, Perkembangan Sosial Emosional, Wanita*

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## **Introduction**

In today's digital era, parents and teenagers face the challenge of filtering information and content suitable for teenagers as the digital world evolves. Unprepared parents and teenagers face various challenges in the digital world when the use of gadgets and the internet is not adequately controlled. This results in multiple forms of mischief that teenagers can cause, including only one pregnancy outside marriage, which ultimately causes the phenomenon of early marriage (Validnews.id, 2024).

Premarital pregnancy and early marriage have significant implications for individuals' social and emotional development. Women who become pregnant out of wedlock may feel isolated and lack adequate social support from their environment. This can lead to stress, anxiety, and depression, all of which negatively impact their emotional development (Validnews.id,2024). Premarital pregnancy also affects social and psychosocial development. Outside of marriage, women who are pregnant outside of wedlock may experience difficulty weaving healthy, balanced relationships with their partners (Alie et al., 2022). This can lead to relationship conflict, lack of communication, and an inability to resolve problems effectively.

Furthermore, the phenomenon of child marriage, commonly referred to as early marriage, is prevalent in Indonesia and is problematic due to its impact on those who marry below the normal age (Putri et al., 2023). In the 2020 National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN), the government targets a reduction in the child marriage rate from 11.2% to 8.74%. Therefore, the recommended age for marriage aims to prevent early marriage. According to the release by Compass (14 November 2021), as many as 82,957 couples aged 19 years or younger were recorded in East Nusa Tenggara. The number of couples who are married at a lower age of 19 years in Nusa Southeast East. This is because the birth and upbringing of children, their education, and their economic well-being are often substandard. A total of 1,615,492 residents, out of a total population of 4,292,522 recorded by the National Population and Family Planning Agency (BKKBN), do not have birth certificates.

## **Method**

This research utilizes a qualitative method with a descriptive approach, which examines in depth the impact of early marriage on women who experience pregnancy outside of marriage on social-emotional development in Kupang city. Informants in this study consist of: 1) Women who are pregnant outside of marriage and who are legally married, 2) Aged <19 years when married, and 3) Domiciled in Kupang City.

This study involved 5 participants; this number was selected based on data saturation considerations, namely, when the data obtained has reached saturation and no new information can be obtained. The selected participants will be observed and interviewed to obtain various information needed in this study. Qualitative researchers, as Human Instruments, are tasked with determining the research focus, selecting informants as data sources, collecting data, assessing data quality, analyzing and interpreting data, and drawing conclusions. In data collection, researchers use several research techniques to obtain the required information. In this section, researchers conduct observations, interview guidelines, and documentation (Sugiyono, 2017).

## **Result**

Based on the interview results, the recordings or audio data were then transcribed verbatim. This verbatim data then became the data analyzed by the author. From the two dimensions used, the author obtained five sub-themes as follows:

### **Family Background**

This family adaptation process is an important reflection in understanding how emotional support is provided to individuals facing difficult situations. The data taken from the interview are as follows:

*"The situation is fine and I live with my family. Initially not because I wanted to go to college, but as time went by my family supported and accepted me" (IM).*

*"Thank God everything is fine. I live separately after getting pregnant. I got married at an early age, and during my pregnancy, my family played a very important role in my life" (FA).*

*"I live with my family. Yes, my family still supports me and gives me advice" (SA).*

Participants indicated that the experience of pregnancy outside of marriage and early marriage had a profound emotional impact on the informants. Most felt shocked, afraid, and anxious when they learned of their pregnancy, with family reactions varying from disappointment to support after the adaptation process.

### **Experiences of Premarital Pregnancy and Early Marriage**

#### **a) Experience During Pregnancy**

Family and social environmental reactions significantly influenced the adaptation process, with either support or pressure often shaping the decision to marry. This condition reflects the influence of social norms and the family's central role in managing unexpected situations. Participants described their experiences as follows.

*"I felt so shocked, anxious, afraid, and confused about what to do. When they found out I was pregnant, they were very surprised and did not expect it" (IM).*

*"I felt fear and sadness. The initial reaction was shock. My family's reaction was disappointment and sadness " (FA)*

*" I was shocked and afraid. My family was also shocked " (SA)*

*" The reaction was normal, but there was disappointment " (NM)*

Despite the emotional pressure and conflict, most participants demonstrated the ability to adapt and gradually cope with their circumstances. These findings highlight the importance of family support, acceptance, and learning processes during this challenging life phase.

#### **b) Decision to Get Married**

The majority of informants stated that their main reasons for getting married were to ensure the legal status of their unborn child, maintain family honor, and fulfill social

expectations in their environment. This drive did not come solely from personal desires, but also from a response to the norms and expectations of the surrounding community. Participants explained:

*" It was to clarify the child's legal status. My family requested a civil marriage so that the child I love would have clear legal status, but my husband's family asked for a religious marriage first" (IM)*

*" It was a decision made by me and my family, with a small amount of pressure from the family" (FA)*

*"We were thinking about the child's future and preventing gossip. We married so we could live together as a couple and raise the child together. It was not because we were fully ready" (NM)*

*" It was to clarify the child's status. My family requested a civil marriage so that the child I was carrying would have clear legal status, but my husband's family asked for a religious marriage first " (MR)*

Family support is a dominant factor, both in the form of direct encouragement and requests to maintain the family's good name. Although some informants expressed personal readiness, the decision to marry is also a compromise they make to navigate the social pressures they face while trying to protect the future of their children and their relationship with their partner (Entuu & Yusuf, 2023).

#### c) Early Marriage Experience

Most informants stated that they had to learn various new skills, such as managing emotions, child-rearing, and effective communication with their partners. In addition, early marriage introduced them to various challenges, including domestic conflict and difficulties in fulfilling daily responsibilities.

*"There are many challenges, such as arguments within the household" (IM)*

*"Many experiences, such as learning responsibility, learning to communicate well, learning to manage emotions, and learning to cooperate with a partner. Of course, there were challenges in emotional control and accepting a partner's shortcomings" (FA)*

*"Happy... from not knowing anything to being able to do everything. At first, I could not manage household tasks, but over time I learned" (SA)*

These findings suggest that although early marriage is accompanied by considerable challenges, it also represents a significant period of personal transformation for these women as they build families and adapt to new social roles.

### **Social and Emotional Impact**

#### **a) Emotional Impact**

The emotional impact of early marriage and premarital pregnancy showed quite a variety of responses among informants. Some informants experienced emotional distress, such as stress, frequent feelings of emotion, and difficulty managing stress, especially during pregnancy and the early stages of marriage.

*"A little stress and often emotional. During pregnancy and after marriage, my emotions were uncontrolled, so I had difficulty managing emotional stress" (IM)*

*" There were feelings of shock, happiness, and emotional fluctuation. I did not feel stressed because I accepted everything as a form of responsibility for what my partner and I had done" (FA)*

*"A little stressed and often emotional. During pregnancy and after marriage, my emotions were completely uncontrolled, so I had difficulty managing emotional stress" (MR)*

Overall, the emotional impact of early marriage depends heavily on an individual's ability to cope with the changes and pressures that arise. Informants who accepted the situation as part of their responsibility tended to have more stable emotional experiences, whereas those who experienced stress reported a greater need for emotional support. This highlights the importance of family and environmental support in helping them cope with the emotional stress that arises.

#### **b) Social Impact**

The social impacts of early marriage and premarital pregnancy often involve negative views from the surrounding community, primarily due to the stigma attached to the situation. Some informants felt they were judged negatively or were the subject of gossip in

their communities. However, not all informants were affected entirely by public opinion, as some chose to remain less social or still received support from their families.

*“I do not really know how society views me because I rarely socialize. I received a lot of support, love, and care from my family” (FA)*

*“From the community’s perspective, they thought I was not good enough” (NM)*

Overall, the social impacts experienced by informants reflect the complexity of the relationship between individuals and their communities. Negative societal perceptions may impose psychological burdens; however, strong family support appears to play a crucial role in reducing these social pressures (Mangande et al., 2021).

#### c) Impact on Education and Career

Premarital pregnancy and early marriage significantly affected the informants’ educational and career trajectories. For most participants, pregnancy disrupted or delayed educational plans, which subsequently limited future career opportunities.

*“When I experienced early pregnancy, I felt resigned because I wanted to pursue higher education but failed due to pregnancy. However, after giving birth, I regained confidence and continued my education and career, although I feel it is somewhat limited” (IM)*

*“ Yes, it had a big impact” (FA)*

*“No” (SA)*

*“It had a significant impact because I could not manage my time for education” (NM)*

*“At first, I felt resigned because I wanted to continue my studies but failed due to pregnancy. After childbirth, I felt confident enough to resume my education and career, although with limitations” (MR)*

Overall, the impact on education and career illustrates the tangible consequences of early marriage and premarital pregnancy, particularly for young women. Nevertheless, despite facing substantial limitations, several informants demonstrated resilience and determination to continue their education and pursue career goals, reflecting their efforts to overcome challenges and reconstruct their life aspirations.

## **Future Hopes and Plans**

### **a) Future Plans**

After experiencing early marriage and confronting its challenges, the informants expressed various hopes and plans for their future. These plans included efforts to improve their quality of life, both economically and in managing family relationships, as well as a desire to resume their interrupted education and career paths. As stated by the informants:

*"I will continue looking for a job so that I can provide for my children in the future. I want to find a good solution and a way forward"* (IM)

*"Yes, I plan to continue my education. Of course, managing emotions and cooperating with each other are very important in marriage"* (FA)

*"Yes. The main thing is to be able to control myself and not be carried away by emotions"* (SA)

*"Looking for a job"* (NM)

The informants' hopes and plans for the future demonstrate a spirit of rising and striving for a better life. Although they face various limitations due to early marriage, their determination to find solutions, continue their education, and create economic stability is evidence of their desire to provide the best for their families and children.

### **b) Support and Hope**

Support from family and close friends was a crucial element for the informants in dealing with early pregnancy and marriage. Furthermore, their hopes for the future extended beyond personal happiness to include the well-being of their children and the successful establishment of stable family lives. The informants expressed these hopes as follows:

*"All I need is support and encouragement so I can survive pregnancy and early marriage. My hope for the future is to become a good mother for my child and a good wife for my small family. I also hope that my career will be successful and that I can meet my child's needs in the future"* (IM)



*“Advice and expressions of affection from my family. My hope for myself is to become a better person and be useful to my family and many others. For my children, their future must be better than that of their parents” (FA)*

*“Receiving attention from my family. For myself, I hope I can become better. For my family, I hope they continue to give attention, and for my child, I hope they will be better than me in the future” (SA)*

*“All I need is support and encouragement so I can survive pregnancy and early marriage. My hope for the future is to become a good mother and wife, have a successful career, and be able to fulfill my child’s needs” (MR)*

With moral and emotional support from their families and confidence in their own abilities, the informants hoped to overcome the challenges they faced. With the hope of becoming better individuals, creating harmonious families, and providing a brighter future for their children, the informants demonstrated strong optimism and determination in navigating life after early marriage.

### **Suggestions and Recommendations**

#### **a) Suggestions for Teenagers**

The advice and recommendations provided by the informants reflect their experiences in dealing with early marriage and a third pregnancy outside of marriage. They emphasized the importance of family support, emotional management, and sound decision-making in dealing with this challenging situation. As expressed by the informants:

*“I hope my friends do not experience what I went through, especially since today is different from the past. If it happens to them or others, I hope they can find a good solution for themselves and those around them. Speak kindly and seek the right and proper solution” (IM)*

*“Stay enthusiastic about life, because having children and getting married at a young age is not as bad as it may seem. However, it is not good to marry due to premarital pregnancy, and it is strongly advised to avoid pregnancy outside of marriage. Be present for others, listen to their stories, and be a good listener and advisor” (NM)*

*"I hope my friends do not experience what I experienced. If it happens, I hope they can find a good and proper solution for themselves and others around them" (MR)*

These suggestions demonstrate a strong desire to raise awareness and prevent other adolescents from undergoing similar experiences. The informants encouraged adolescents to respect family values, avoid impulsive decisions, and view life challenges as learning opportunities. They hope that younger generations will make more responsible choices and lead healthier, more informed lives.

#### b) Policy Recommendations

In terms of policy recommendations, the informants emphasized the critical role of government, families, and communities in addressing cases of premarital pregnancy and early marriage. These recommendations aim not only to respond to existing cases but also to prevent future occurrences through education and adequate support systems. The informants stated:

*" My recommendation is that there should be socialization and education on how to deal with premarital pregnancy and early marriage. Positive support and assistance, such as holding meetings with psychologists, are important because mental health plays a significant role in this issue" (FA)*

*"When dealing with situations like this, families should listen to the child's reasons and not immediately respond with anger. Excessive pressure or scolding can increase stress and worsen the situation, so children should not be isolated" (SA)*

*" There should be more outreach and education for adolescents to reduce situations like this in the future" (NM)*

Overall, these policy recommendations highlight the importance of collaborative efforts among government institutions, families, and communities in addressing and preventing premarital pregnancy and early marriage through education, emotional support, and mental health interventions.

## **Discussion**

Interview results indicate that family background plays a significant role in the social and emotional development of women who marry at an early age or experience an out-of-wedlock pregnancy. Initial situations are often marked by strong emotional reactions, such as disappointment, shock, or even family rejection. As George Herbert Mead stated in symbolic interactionism, identity and individual behavior are formed through social interactions and symbolic meanings; family support or rejection can shape adolescents' self-perception and emotions, thereby directly affecting their social and emotional development (Hani Apriliani, 2022).

However, over time, most families come to terms with the situation, though the process is challenging and takes time. Family support appears to be a key factor in helping young women cope with the social and emotional stress that arises from this situation. Informants reported that family, as a place of shelter or a counselor, provides a sense of security and serves as an important foundation for the adaptation process. For example, IM and MR acknowledged that although their families were initially disappointed, they eventually became supportive over time. Similarly, SA and FA emphasized the important role of family in providing advice and support during pregnancy and early marriage. In conclusion, families with supportive responses can help young women cope with the severe emotional stress of out-of-wedlock pregnancy and early marriage.

If family support is minimal, the risk of impaired emotional and social development for these individuals tends to be greater. As George Herbert Mead stated, identity and individual behavior are formed through social interactions and symbolic meanings. Adolescents need support from their environment, including family, to develop a healthy sense of self; if this support is minimal, they are at risk of role confusion and impaired social and emotional development, especially in the context of premarital pregnancy and early marriage (Hani Apriliani, 2022).

### **a) Experience of Pregnancy Outside of Marriage**

The decision to marry is a common step taken by women who experience an out-of-wedlock pregnancy. This step is often influenced by social pressure, the need to protect the

family's reputation, and efforts to ensure the child's legal status. Most informants reported that the decision was not entirely based on personal readiness, but rather on social norms and family expectations. Some informants, such as IM and MR, emphasized the importance of clarifying the child's status through formal marriage. However, others revealed that they married to avoid community gossip or to meet family expectations, even though they did not feel personally ready. Early marriage itself is a complex and challenging experience. Women who marry at a young age must learn many new skills, including managing emotions, parenting, and communicating effectively with their partners.

b) Social and emotional impacts

The social and emotional impacts experienced by women who experience early marriage and premarital pregnancy vary widely. These emotional impacts can range from feelings of stress and inability to control emotions to feelings of happiness and acceptance of the situation. In this study, several participants reported experiencing significant emotional distress, particularly during pregnancy and after marriage. One participant, IM, reported feeling stressed and often losing control of her emotions, making it difficult for her to cope with the pressure. Similarly, MR reported feeling emotionally uncontrollable during pregnancy and after marriage. However, some demonstrated the ability to accept the situation well, despite initial shock and fear. FA, for example, revealed that despite initial fear and sadness, she was able to accept the situation as a form of responsibility for what she and her partner had done. Similarly, other participants, despite initial shock and anxiety, were able to adapt well over time.

Regarding the impact on education and careers, most informants revealed that premarital pregnancy and early marriage had a significant impact on their educational and career plans. IM revealed that she initially felt resigned because her pregnancy prevented her from continuing her studies. However, after giving birth, she felt confident about continuing her education and career despite several obstacles. MR felt the same way, noting that pregnancy and early marriage had limited her ability to continue her education and career. Despite this, her enthusiasm for continuing her education remained. On the other hand, other participants, like FA, felt that pregnancy and marriage did not significantly impact their careers or education, but still adapted to the current situation.

c) Hopes and plans for the future

The informants' hopes and plans for the future, after facing the challenges of early marriage and out-of-wedlock pregnancy, reflect a desire to improve their quality of life. Each informant plans to continue their education, find employment, and achieve economic stability for their families' future. Some expressed a desire to continue their education, which had been interrupted due to pregnancy and early marriage, such as FA, who planned to continue her education and emphasized the importance of emotional management and cooperation in marriage. Meanwhile, IM and MR expressed their intention to find work to provide for their children and families. Furthermore, the informants' plans included efforts to manage family relationships better and ensure their children's well-being. Their hopes included being good mothers, supportive wives, and achieving career success.

d) Suggestions and recommendations

In this section, the informants provide advice and recommendations based on their experiences with early marriage and premarital pregnancy, to prevent similar incidents and provide guidance for other adolescents. They emphasize the importance of family support, emotional management, and sound decision-making in dealing with difficult situations. IM, for example, hopes her friends will not experience the same experiences and advises them to find good solutions and speak wisely. FA emphasizes the importance of positive support and preventing negative thoughts, such as abortion or suicide. Meanwhile, SA advises against going against family, especially parents, and to always provide support to children who have made mistakes. NM encourages adolescents to remain enthusiastic and receptive to every story, and to be good listeners and advisors. Based on the research conducted, the findings indicate that social interaction plays a significant role in shaping the identity and socio-emotional development of women who become pregnant at an early age. These findings are in line with the social interaction theory proposed by George Herbert Mead, which explains that individual behavior and identity are formed through social interactions and symbolic meanings, influencing social and emotional development, including in the context of premarital pregnancy and early marriage (Hani Apriliani, 2022).

## **Conclusion**

The phenomenon of premarital pregnancy leading to early marriage among adolescent girls in Kupang City reflects the complexity of the social, emotional, and cultural issues they face in the context of today's digital society. Based on the research results, it is known that adolescent girls who experience premarital pregnancy are not only victims of circumstances, but also active subjects who think and respond to the situation reflectively. They experience deep emotional and cognitive processes, such as fear, shame, anxiety, and confusion, but also consider various social consequences before making decisions, including the decision to marry.

The ability to think and interpret the situation develops through the social interactions they experience. The reactions of family, partners, and the surrounding community shape how they view themselves and their experiences. These interactions reinforce or even create emotional stress and form new social identities laden with stigma. The meaning of pregnancy and early marriage is formed and negotiated through social interactions. Social symbols such as scorn, family pressure, or demands for child status are interpreted differently by each individual depending on their experiences, social support, and mindset. This demonstrates that meaning is not fixed, but instead dynamically created within a social context.

The meanings and symbols formed influence the informants' actions and attitudes in their daily lives. Some choose to rise above and adapt to their new roles as wives and mothers, while others withdraw from their social environment due to pressure and stigma. The experience of early marriage also serves as a learning and transformational space for these women, shaping their emotional management, household responsibilities, and interpersonal relationships.

## *Suggestion*

Education and awareness programs are crucial to increase knowledge about the impacts of early marriage and out-of-wedlock pregnancy among adolescents. Education

involving schools, families, and communities can help adolescents make wiser decisions and avoid impulsive, risky choices.

Families should play an active role in providing emotional support to individuals experiencing early marriage or out-of-wedlock pregnancy. Communities need to reduce negative stigma and be more accepting by offering strong moral support to help them face these challenges.

Adequate psychological services are needed for individuals experiencing stress due to early marriage or out-of-wedlock pregnancy. These services can help them manage their emotions and provide a more positive perspective on life.

Considering the importance of emotional management and communication within the family, counseling on these skills is highly needed. This will help create more harmonious relationships between partners, which positively impacts family life.

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