# THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS ASPECT ON THE OCCURRENCE OF EARLY MARRIAGE

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**Abstract**.
Early marriage is a form of violence and violation of children's rights. It occurs due to many factors.Brides of early marriage also have a greater variety of bad risks related to health. This study aims to identify how the social, cultural and religious aspects influence the occurrence of early marriage. The relevant studies were searched systematically using 4 databases (PubMed, Ebscohost, ProQuest, and Science Direct), according to keywords that have been predetermined. Searches were restricted to the articles from 2008-2018. Articles were selected based on PRISMA guidelines. Then the researchers conducted critical appraisal. It was found 9 articles in the form of qualitative studies that meet the inclusion criteria and had good quality of article. The findings and analysis revealed that readiness to get married was often assessed based on signs of physical change and puberty that occur in adolescents by the social environment including family members. Therefore, there was not enough power for teenagers to make decisions. The influence of culture and perceptions of early marriage made women unaware of the dangers or effects of early marriage, which caused this practice keep going on. Meanwhile, religion or belief was often a factor that triggers or reinforces the making of early marriage decisions. Based on the results of this systematic literature review, it is found that social, cultural and spiritual aspects play important roles in influencing early marriage decisions.

Keywords: early marriage, PRISMA, bad risks

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Early marriage is a form of violence and violations of children's rights [1]. In the world, it is currently estimated that the number of early marriage cases are up to 650 millions. That's the number of young women who have been married before the age of 18 and adult women who have been married at the age of children or adolescents. It is getting smaller compared to the previous UNICEF's report in 2014 [2], which was 700 million women who marriages before the age of 18 years. Over the past decade, there has been a decrease in the proportion of young women (20-24 years) who carry out early marriages from 25% (1 of 4) to 21% (1 of 5) [3].

Child marriage in many countries in the world is defined as formal and informal marriage before the age of 18 [4]. However, there are many countries that still legalize and allow teenagers between the age of 16-18 to get married with parental consent, which raises questions about the concept of childhood and cross-cultural marriage. This becomes a problem because it will create difficulties in defining forced marriages and child marriages that occurred [5].

Brides of child marriages are at greater risk of experiencing various health-related problems. Those girls must be having children at a young age when they are not ready yet, dropping out of school, being less productive during their lives and living in poverty compared to their peers who

married at the mature age. Child brides are also more likely to experience violence from their partners, limited physical mobility, and limited decision-making abilities. The other most fundamental thing is that those child brides can be weakened byways of depriving them of their basic rights to health, education, and safety [4].

Early marriage occurre due to various factors. Research of Råssjö and Kiwanuka [6], revealed that young people have been victims of cultural practices. In addition, research conducted by McDougal et al. [7], shows that early marriage is closely related to social norms that are believed and lived in family and society. Girls are rarely involved in the initiation of early marriage. even though the autonomy of decision making is on the hand of women, the parents, especially fathers, are the most important decision makers. The social and cultural norms in the event of early marriage are often linked to a religious doctrine. Religion is often used as a justification for the occurrence of early marriage. Parents will be willing to marry their children before the age of 18 if there are good and appropriate intentions. They justify their decision out of the value of Islam that allows parents to marry off their daughters after puberty [8].

As a matter of fact, the government targeted that in 2030 the child marriage must have been finished. The target is one one of the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals or commonly known as SDGs [9]. However, investments to end the practice of early marriage are still limited, and throughout the world, the incidence of child marriages has declined too slowly over time to reach the SDG's target [9]. Therefore, researchers conducted a Systematic Literature Review to look at the social, cultural and religious roles that influence the practice of early marriage.

## 2. METHODS

### 2.1. Searching Strategy

Identification of relevant studies is done through four Online Databases (PubMed, Ebscohost, ProQuest, and Science Direct) according to keywords that have been predetermined. The keywords used in this Systematic Literature Review is : *("Early Marriage" OR "Child Marriage" OR "Child Brides" OR "Adolescent Marriage" OR "Teenage Marriage" OR "Forced Marriage" OR "Young Brides" AND Social OR Culture OR Tradition OR Religion OR Spiritual OR Belief OR Faith)*

### 2.2. Inclusion and exclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria of this review are qualitative research that examines early marriage and its relationship with social, cultural and religious aspects, carried out in developing countries, from 2008-2018, and in English. Meanwhile, articles that were carried out during the conflict or carried out in the refugee's area were excluded as the exclusion criteria.

### 2.3. Selection of Articles

The relevant results from each database obtained 1,261 articles, which were then stored in the reference manager *(Mendeley)* to go through the screening process (Figure 1).

### 2.4. Quality assessment

To find out the quality of each article that will be reviewed, a critical appraisal was conducted by the researchers independently. The researcher used Critical Appraisal tools from The Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) for qualitative research which consists of 10 questions.
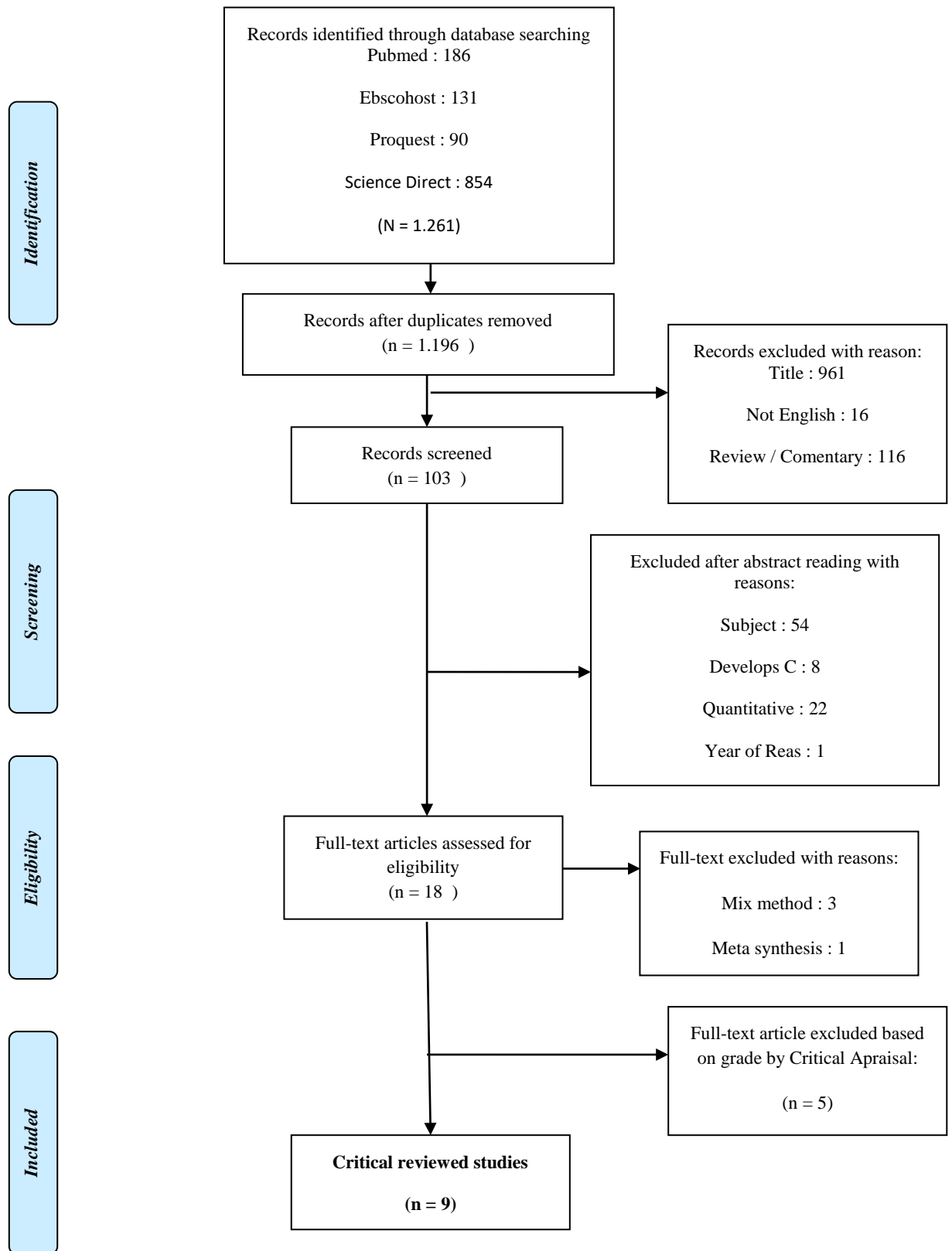
**Identification**

Records identified through database searching
Pubmed : 186

Ebscohost : 131

Proquest : 90

Science Direct : 854

(N = 1.261)

Records after duplicates removed
(n = 1.196  )

Records excluded with reason:
Title : 961

Not English : 16

Review / Comentary : 116

**Screening**

Records screened
(n = 103  )

Excluded after abstract reading with reasons:

Subject : 54

Develops C : 8

Quantitative : 22

Year of Reas : 1

**Eligibility**

Full-text articles assessed for eligibility
(n = 18  )

Full-text excluded with reasons:

Mix method : 3

Meta synthesis : 1

**Included**

Full-text article excluded based on grade by Critical Apraisal:

(n = 5)

**Critical reviewed studies**

**(n = 9)**

Figure 1 Prisma Flow Diagram

## 3.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings from the systematic search obtained the results of nine articles published from 2010-2018. The articles included in this review are from several developing countries in the Asian and African such as Iran (n = 1), Pakistan (n = 1), Ethiopia and India (n = 1), Uganda (n = 1), Democratic Republic of Congo (n = 1), Tanzania (n = 1), Kenya (n = 1), and Morocco (n = 2). The majority of participants in the study were women who had experience of early marriage, then there were teenagers, parents, and some studies also use the key informants who understood the problems of early marriage practices. The results of this systematic literature review show there are four articles that discuss the influence of social aspects in early marriage practices. Many studies states that there is a role or influence on social aspects that encourage marriage in adolescents [5], [7], [10], [11].

From the review conducted, it is known that there are several articles that suggest the influence or role of culture in early marriage. The results of the research revealed that adolescents as the victims of cultural practices [6].  The cultural or traditional factors encourage parents to marry off their children like the *"Bashi"* tradition in Congo, forced marriage is also seen as a way to prevent young people from having sexual relations before marriage [12]. The influence of cultural factors in early marriage is already expressed in several previous research [8], [10], [13]-[15]

There are three articles that discussed the religious aspect in early marriage practices. A study by Montazeri et al. [10], revealed that the decision making related to early marriage is influenced by factors of religious belief, such as following the prophet's advice, and preventing bad actions such as sexual intercourse outside of marriage. In addition to social and cultural factors, religious factors strengthen and have a strong influence on the incidence of early marriage [15]. Respondents from research carried out in Pakistan, thought that Islam advised parents to marry off their daughters immediately after puberty, as an excuse to justify their point of view about early marriage. Because of this strong influence of religion, it is possible to practice early marriage continuously [8].

### 3.1. Social Aspects in Early Marriage

Social aspects have a considerable influence on the occurrence of early marriage. The readiness of married is often judged based on signs of physical change and puberty that occur in adolescents by the social environment including family members. Early marriage decisions are usually triggered by social pressures that influence parents as decision makers [7]. Early marriages that occur often force girls to accept new responsibilities even though they are frequently unprepared both physically and psychologically. However, this is still present and done because of various factors behind. In social settings and family structures often do not provide much space for young people to make decisions. Early marriage is often regarded as a way for adolescents to achieve independence and social identity. They assume that marriage will bring them more respect, peace, love, and autonomy in decision making [10]. Although early marriage is sometimes chosen by teenagers themselves to meet social needs, such as the need for respect, independence and others, early marriage also often occurs due to family factors, especially parents. Research conducted in Morocco, revealed that honor of the family is very important. This is also guarded through the status and behavior of the young woman from the family. Frequently, to protect the honor of the family, the young woman was married to prevent unwanted problems in the future, such as pre-marital relations, rape, and kidnapping. This was also triggered by fears of parents because of the increasing number of violence against children and women, so parents chose to marry their children at a young age, even if necessary by force. But without realizing it, parents actually engage in violence against children and women through early marriage and forced marriage [11]. In addition, in India, it was found that there is a social stigma that occurs when a girl chooses to remain unmarried

especially if there is a man who is considered as a good and suitable for the girl, because other potential partners who are suitable may no longer exist as the girl getting older. This is often feared by parents, especially mothers, and frequently mothers become a the decision-makers in this matter without involving their daughters [7].

Socio-cultural factors have a strong influence on adolescent sexual behavior which triggers early marriage and teen pregnancy [16]. The beliefs and decisions of parents in deciding the occurrence of marriage is one of the reasons that influence the occurrence of early marriage. In addition, after marriage, there will be social pressure to this young couple to immediately have children, to avoid the issues of infertility [17]. As a trigger factor of early marriage, it can be seen that social aspects play a role in many ways related to how early marriage decisions are taken. Social norms in the family play an important role in the emergence of early marriage. Besides that, the social environment outside the family is also one of the factors, such as the stigma often attached to unmarried girls in the age of those who are considered eligible to get married. This of course must be a concern in the future, especially in terms of finding solutions to end the practice of early marriage.

### 3.2. Cultural Aspects in Early Marriage

From some results of the research, it is known that cultural aspects are an important factor in early marriage decision making. Research conducted in Iran shows that tradition and culture are the driving factors for early marriage. It is the same as the explanation of previous social factors because indeed social and cultural factors are often cannot be separated. In a cultural context, marriage is considered as the only way for women to gain social identity, this happens and remains unchanged between 3 generations [10].

In addition, research conducted in Uganda revealed how cultural practices play a role in early marriage. The practice of tradition and culture related to early marriage even starts with seeing signs of adulthood in adolescents. Parents decide which one already adults by only looking at physical characteristics, such as breast growth, the start of menstruation in women and changes in sound and growth of beards in men. If the signs are already there, these considered as a sign that someone must marry and have children. Even if there are women over the age of 18, staying with their families and not going to school will be seen as a curse and a taboo thing. It is known that there is a tradition from a tribe in western Uganda that encourages their young people to practice sexual relations so that they are ready when they find someone to get married. In addition there are also rumors that some Muslims choose to marry their daughters earlier with older men, referring to the Qur'an. This is certainly a culture and tradition that is quite dangerous for adolescents, especially women [6]

There is also a bashi tradition in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which assumes that if a woman sleeps outside with her partner for one night, it means that the woman is no longer a virgin, therefore the woman must marry her partner, because it is impossible to sleep at her boyfriend's place overnight without doing anything (sexual relations). In this case, parents not only protect their children but are afraid they will be blamed for the actions of their children. On the other hand, forced marriage is seen as a way to prevent young people from having sexual relations before marriage and changing bad behavior (having sex before marriage) can be acceptable behavior [12].

The things that are not much different also occur in Tanzania, marriage is seen as an ordinary natural event along with someone's puberty. Although not all of them, some families have even prepared their children for the responsibility of early marriage at the age of 15 or 16 through a tradition called "*Unyago*" [15]. Research conducted by Juma et al., also shows how the influence of culture in the practice of early marriage. There is a culture known as "*Luo*" where when a wife dies, the position as a wife will be replaced with her sister. Based on this tradition, the daughter will be married to her brother-in-law. This practice forces girls to marry while they are still young as a duty of culture, sometimes for men who are even 2 times older

than the age of the girl. What is more dangerous is the risk of sexually transmitted diseases that they might get, especially if the cause of their sibling's death is due to HIV / AIDS [13]. In India, there are also traditions that are considered to have a major influence on sexual behavior which ultimately leads to early marriage. One study showed that there was a tradition of initiation ceremonies for teenagers who had just reached puberty. Young women are taught about marriage, and how to care for their husbands later. This ceremony is considered as a symbol of maturity which eventually leads to great curiosity in adolescents to eventually become involved in active sexual behavior. Therefore in this study also revealed that what is generally known is that early marriage causes teenage pregnancy. However, what is also not uncommon is that early marriage is a response to teenage pregnancies that occur [16]. The influence of culture and perceptions of early marriage makes women unaware of the dangers or effects of early marriage, which causes this practice to continue [8]. The results of this study are also supported by another research that revealed the practice of marriage arrangements was accepted by women because their culture of virginity and reputation were closely related to the honor of the family. Therefore the family considers them to have a legitimate right to interfere in the sexual life and love of their daughter. Women are often subjected to family decisions and often do not know the fact that this is a violation of their rights [18]. Therefore, cultural aspects in early marriage practices must be taken into consideration when making policies in order to suppress and end this practice.

### 3.3. Religion Aspect in Early Marriage

Early marriage does not only occur because of socio-cultural aspects. As with many other social problems, especially those related to health problems, early marriage is also caused by many factors that are interconnected and strengthen each other, one of which is religion or religious beliefs. Religion or belief is often a factor that triggers or strengthens the taking of early marriage decisions. The decision to get married is related to the influence of religion. Participants in his research conveyed an understanding of marriage to follow the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad, that based on Islamic religious beliefs when a person marries, they perfects half of their religion. Therefore, marriage is considered to increase human maturity. However, it is often ruled out that in fact, this sentence does not mean forcing people to marry when they are not physically or psychologically prepared. Quoted from the Koran (2: 286), which means: "*Allah does not impose upon any soul a duty but to the extent of its ability*". In this study what actually happened was that families encouraged their children to get married, while girls could not make decisions independently because they were too young and lacked adequate knowledge and skills. Therefore religion is often used as a justification for early marriage [10].

Parents would receive marriage before the age of 18 if there were appropriate and good applications, they tried to ascertain their point of view with the connotation that Islam would seek parents to marry off their daughters who wanted to get puberty. This of course must be discussed further and more clearly, because there are recommendations that are accepted based on the size of puberty that really exist or because of the incomplete understanding related to the recommendation for marriage in Islamic religion [8]. Therefore, if this religious doctrine is not understood in its entirety, it will lead to many misconceptions, as if Islam allows early marriage only from a measure of physical maturity such as puberty. There is a strong influence from religious leaders that can actually influence parents. However, because the limitation of the knowledge especially in rural areas where some people are uneducated, and there is an understanding of the different religious orders, causing compulsory conditions in sharia such as the need of agreement between the both man and woman is often overlooked. In fact, some

religious leaders argue that not only physical maturity needs to be considered but also psychologically which is very important for someone before marriage [8], [14], [15]

## 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this systematic literature review, it is known that social, cultural and spiritual aspects play an important role of influencing early marriage decisions. Social and cultural norms that have long been exist and used in the community make the practice of early marriage difficult to stop. In addition, aspects of spirituality or religious beliefs are often used to justify early marriage. These various factors are actually interconnected each other and mutually reinforcing until finally the decision to get married early is made.

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