

Analysis of Parental Social Actions in Early Childhood Marriages in South Sulawesi

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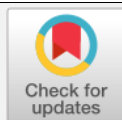
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ABSTRACT

This study aims to (1) explore the social actions undertaken by parents in early childhood marriages and (2) analyze the impacts of early childhood marriages on those involved. The research employs a mixed-methods approach using an exploratory sequential design, integrating qualitative and quantitative methods. The study population includes all early childhood marriages, with a sample size comprising 10%. The informants interviewed were the parents of early-marriage couples. Data collection methods involved in-depth interviews, participant observation, questionnaires, and literature reviews. Qualitative data analysis followed a three-stage technique, while quantitative data analysis employed frequency tabulation. The findings reveal that (1) Social actions in early childhood marriages fall into four categories: instrumental rationality, value rationality, traditional actions, and affective actions. (2) Early childhood marriages result in both positive and negative impacts. Positive outcomes include fostering independence, responsibility, and maturity among the couples, while negative outcomes include family disharmony, emotional instability, and divorce. In conclusion, early childhood marriage couples can be categorized based on four types of social actions, each driven by different motivations for marriage. This study recommends providing guidance and support to all early childhood marriage couples to help them navigate their marital lives successfully.

Keywords: Early Childhood Marriages; Parental Social Actions; Social Impacts; South Sulawesi; Weberian Rationality

1. Introduction

Marriage is a physical and emotional bond between a man and a woman in a socially recognized relationship. Its purpose is to legalize the marital union, provide legitimacy for children, and establish role distribution between partners (Ali et al., 2022). According to the Indonesian Marriage Law Number 1 of 1974, marriage is defined as a physical and emotional bond between a man and a woman as husband and wife, aiming to create a happy and lasting family based on belief in God Almighty (Azwar, 2022). Subsequently, Law Number 16 of 2019, an amendment to the earlier Marriage Law of 1974, established a minimum age requirement of 19 years for both male and female prospective spouses. This policy has been welcomed by Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs, which has actively promoted its socialization across various social strata, from marginalized to working-class groups. The updated regulation aims to provide greater protection for society, particularly for couples intending to marry early.

According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) data from 2023, Indonesia ranks fourth globally in early childhood marriage cases, with approximately 25.53 million recorded instances (UNICEF, 2022). The impacts of early childhood marriages are multisectoral, necessitating a collective commitment and cross-sectoral collaboration between government ministries, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and other institutions (Alhassan et al., 2021; Schiavo, 2024). However, concerns remain as 8.60% of these cases originate predominantly from regions in Java, which have the highest absolute numbers. National survey data from Indonesia's Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in 2023 reveal that the highest percentage of women marrying at an early age was found in West Sulawesi at 11.25%, followed by Central Kalimantan at 10.94%, East Java at 8.86%, South Kalimantan at 8.74%, Central Java at 7.82%, and South Sulawesi at 7.48% (BPS, 2023).

Marriage dispensation data refers to the granting of permission by the Religious Court in Makassar for underage couples (below 18 years old) to proceed with marriage upon the request of both parties. Research conducted by UNICEF indicates that early childhood marriages often result in pregnancies with a higher likelihood of premature births, malnutrition, and elevated maternal and infant mortality rates. These cases are also associated with risks of hemorrhage and poisoning during childbirth (Diabelková et al., 2023; Sezgin & Punamäki, 2020).

Sociologically, various considerations motivate parents to marry off their children at a young age. These motivations underpin the emergence of parental social actions, which can be categorized into four types: instrumental rational actions, value-rational actions, affective social actions, and traditional social actions (Ritzer, 2014).

In Makassar, national survey data published by Indonesia's Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in 2023 reveal that early childhood marriages remain significantly prevalent, with 2,623 couples recorded (Prawiranegara, 2022; Purnama, 2022). This observation is corroborated by preliminary field research in Makassar, which highlights contributing factors such as economic hardships, leading parents to neglect their children's welfare, as well as pregnancies resulting from premarital relationships due to free social interactions.

Furthermore, previous data collected through direct observation and in-depth interviews with residents indicate that some early marriages were chosen as a solution by the individuals involved, though many faced issues such as broken homes due to domestic violence. Early childhood marriages in Makassar negatively impact the children born into these unions. However, not all such marriages are detrimental to society. Frequently, early childhood marriages are driven by a desire to prevent actions deemed unacceptable by religious principles or societal norms, such as premarital relationships.

Existing studies have largely failed to address the crucial reasons behind parents marrying off their children at an early age. These studies often overlook fundamental issues surrounding early childhood marriages. Research on early childhood marriages has generally been mapped into three aspects. First, the legal aspect classifies early childhood marriages as a violation of law (Bastomi, 2016; Rifiani, 2011). Second, the psychological aspect considers these couples mentally unprepared, potentially leading to challenges in their marital life (Karney & Bradbury, 2020; Sezgin & Punamäki, 2020; Yoosefi Lebni et al., 2023). Third, the socio-economic aspect views early childhood marriages as reducing parents' economic burdens (Andrade et al., 2022; Parsons et al., 2015). However, there is still a lack of studies focusing on the social actions of parents in early childhood marriages and the impacts on children who marry at an early age. This gap highlights the urgency of conducting this research to mitigate the negative impacts of early childhood marriages through appropriate parental social actions.

This study aims to address the shortcomings of previous research. Accordingly, the following research questions are proposed: (1) What social actions are undertaken by parents in early childhood marriages? (2) How do early childhood marriages impact the individuals involved? The answers to these questions are expected to provide valuable input for policymakers in drafting regulations related to early childhood marriages and minimizing their negative impacts. Furthermore, the findings will strengthen existing studies on the reasons why parents marry off their children at an early age.

This research is based on two main arguments: first, the incidence of early childhood marriages has shown a rising trend in South Sulawesi. Second, couples involved in early childhood marriages are also more likely to experience divorce. Parents' expectations of ensuring their children's happiness through early marriages often become irrelevant in these cases.

2. Literature Review

Social actions are actions imbued with subjective meaning by an individual and directed toward others. According to Weber, social actions can be categorized into four types: (1) instrumental rational actions, (2) value-oriented rational actions, (3) affective actions, and (4) traditional actions (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2021).

1) Instrumental Rational Actions

Instrumental rational actions involve deliberate calculations of the alignment between the methods employed and the objectives to be achieved. These actions are carefully planned through gathering information, identifying opportunities and obstacles, and considering the consequences of choices. Instrumental rationality emphasizes efficiency and effectiveness in achieving a specific goal (Ritzer, 2012).

2) Value-Oriented Rational Actions

Value-oriented rational actions prioritize societal values and norms rather than personal objectives. These actions emphasize calculating benefits without necessarily focusing on the end goals. In this type of action, individuals follow what is considered good or bad by societal standards rather than choosing the best methods or outcomes. The focus is on conformity to social values rather than maximizing personal gain (Ritzer & Goodman, 2004).

3) Traditional Actions

Traditional actions are those performed out of habit, without conscious planning or rational reflection. These actions stem from established behavioral patterns passed down through

generations. They are typically not guided by economic calculations and are often considered irrational.

4) Affective Actions

Affective actions are characterized by the dominance of emotions or feelings rather than intellectual considerations or conscious planning. These actions often emerge as expressions or responses to particular situations, resulting in emotional outbursts such as anger, sadness, or joy. Affective actions are considered irrational because they are not guided by logic, ideology, or other criteria of rationality (J. H. Turner, 2019).

Based on this paradigm, researchers can observe the intricacies of social phenomena and identify ways to minimize the prevalence of early childhood marriages in Makassar. This can be achieved through the following strategies:

- 1) Providing formal education to ensure better access to employment as preparation for supporting a family.
- 2) Promoting sexual education to address the lack of information on reproductive rights, which is a contributing factor to high rates of early childhood marriages in Makassar.
- 3) Empowering local communities to raise awareness about the dangers of early childhood marriages, emphasizing the role of parents and the surrounding community as key stakeholders in prevention efforts.
- 4) Enhancing the role of local governments in collaboration with community leaders, religious figures, and cultural leaders to enforce minimum marriage age regulations.
- 5) Encouraging gender equality to ensure women's rights and opportunities to thrive are preserved and promoted.

3. Research Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods through an exploratory sequential design, wherein quantitative data strengthen the qualitative findings (Tashakkori & Teddie, 2010). The first stage involves qualitative research and a quantitative phase to complement and enhance the qualitative data (Creswell, 2013). Employing this mixed-methods approach is essential to ensure a broader respondent coverage and a deeper exploration of the research focus. The study informants consist of parents of early marriage couples, with a sample size of 263 parents drawn from 2,632 couples.

Data collection techniques include direct observation, in-depth interviews, questionnaires, and literature reviews. Qualitative data analysis employs a three-stage model—data reduction, categorization, and conclusion drawing—to analyze interview and observation data (Miles & Huberman, 1999). Quantitative data analysis is conducted through frequency tabulation based on questionnaire results (Sugiyono, 2008).

4. Results

4.1. Parental Social Actions in Early Childhood Marriages

4.1.1. Instrumental Rational Actions

Instrumental rational actions include parental and economic factors. These are deliberate actions based on careful consideration to achieve specific objectives. For example, one parent of an early marriage couple described their decision-making process, weighing the pros and cons of marrying off their child. The parent expressed concerns over their child's increasingly liberal social interactions, often spending time outside with a partner. They carefully monitored and

managed their child's behavior to prevent undesirable situations from affecting the family's reputation within the local community. The parent explained,

"My family and I often worry about our child's behavior when they go out frequently with their partner. Even if they claim it is for studying together, their constant outings make us anxious." (Personal communication, 2024)

Based on this analysis, one of the contributing factors to early childhood marriages includes economic and socio-cultural influences. Parents often choose to marry off their children early, viewing it as the best solution for their family's economic well-being.

Another reason cited by parents of early-marriage couples is financial hardship. One parent explained,

"The early marriage of my child was due to the heavy economic burden our family faced (on the bride's side). This made it easier for us to agree to marry her off, even though she was only 16 years old and still in school. We hoped this would reduce our family's financial burden, as the groom's family is more economically stable. This arrangement has benefited our family, easing the parents' responsibilities and addressing financial difficulties." (Personal communication, 2024)

In contrast, families with steady incomes can typically meet their needs more easily. However, meeting basic family needs remains a significant challenge for those without stable jobs. These circumstances often drive families to consider early marriage as a practical solution.

Based on the interviews, it can be concluded that parents' decisions to marry off their children, even while they are still high school students, are often motivated by economic needs and the desire to achieve family objectives.

4.1.2. Pure Social Actions

Pure social actions are individual actions directed toward achieving goals rationally. These actions are based on conscious choices aimed at fulfilling specific objectives. As one informant stated:

"My child got married because they were in love and had known each other for a long time. Even though they were still in school, they loved each other, so it was better to marry them immediately to avoid potential issues." (Personal Communication, 2024)

This interview reflects the importance of the sanctity of marriage to parents, highlighting their emphasis on upholding the purity and values of marriage as an institution.

4.1.3. Affective Actions

Affective actions are dominated by emotions or feelings rather than intellectual reflection or deliberate planning. These actions often occur without careful preparation, as in early childhood marriages influenced by romantic feelings.

The researcher's findings indicate that affective actions are prevalent among parents who decided to marry off their children at an early age without adequate planning, often influenced by societal pressures and premarital relationships. One informant, identified as AY, shared:

"My child got married because they were in love and had known each other for a long time. Even though they were under 16 years old, I worried about the possibility of pregnancy before marriage. I thought it was better to marry them off to avoid sin, and we, as parents, supported their decision." (Personal Communication, 2024)

This statement underscores the sacred nature of marriage as perceived by the parents, who see it as the foundation of family life, ensuring that their children enter into marriage in a state of purity.

4.1.4. Traditional Actions

Traditional actions are rooted in customs and traditions passed down through generations. One informant, HM, described this cultural expectation:

"Since the time of our ancestors, when a girl reaches the age of 16 and receives a marriage proposal, it is accepted – even if she is still in school. Neighbors might say she'll become an old maid, and no parent wants their child labeled as such. Especially today, with increasing social freedom, we fear they might marry alone if we don't arrange it soon." (Personal Communication, 2024)

Based on this interview, the researcher questioned why parents choose to marry off their children at a young age, often below 19. The reasons stem from concerns about societal judgment and gossip about unmarried girls. For example, societal norms in Makassar suggest that if a girl remains unmarried by the age of 23, it becomes a source of shame for the family. Parents often feel pressured by community expectations and adhere to the principle of *"siri'na pace"* (a sense of shame) that compels them to marry off their children, even at a young age.

Similarly, in Makassar, the process of marrying children is deeply rooted in local traditions and customs that have been passed down through generations. This reality was affirmed by a parent, identified as SR, who married off their child at an early age:

"Nowadays, children tend to marry at a young age rather than waiting until adulthood. This is often because they can help their parents economically sooner and allow the family to have grandchildren earlier." (Personal Communication, 2024)

Based on this interview, it can be concluded that parents hold a belief that a child's sustenance (*rezeki*) is predetermined by Allah SWT. Thus, rejecting a marriage proposal could negatively impact the child, potentially discouraging future proposals and leaving the child unmarried. For this reason, most parents seek their child's consent or input before deciding, ensuring that the family bears no blame for the outcome. However, within a different paradigm, some parents argue that modern societal developments and shifting mindsets have influenced their views on their children's future and family life, leading to a more progressive approach to decision-making. Nonetheless, many parents continue to indoctrinate their children with traditional values to achieve what they perceive as a higher quality of life compared to before marriage.

In this context, the researcher interviewed FR, a parent of an early marriage child, who shared:

"My child got married before turning 18. It wasn't an arranged marriage; they were dating and brought their partner home to introduce them to me. I asked if they were ready and capable, then allowed them to proceed with marriage. Better to let them marry than delay and risk negative gossip from the neighbors. You know how neighbors always meddle in other people's business rather than minding their own." (Personal Communication, 2024)

RH, a community elder, expressed a similar sentiment:

"Boys and girls in the outskirts of Makassar are sometimes hard to advise or control. They think they know better than us. This is due to free social interactions; parents often neglect their responsibilities, letting their children roam freely without supervision. Sometimes, the children rebel against their parents, refusing to be monitored, and only return home late at night." (Personal Communication, 2024)

These statements highlight the significant influence of cultural, economic, and social factors on the persistence of early childhood marriages in Makassar.

Based on the various explanations provided by informants, aside from economic and cultural factors influencing early childhood marriages, parental matchmaking rooted in local traditions also plays a significant role. In practice, numerous cases of girls marrying before the age of 17 have been reported, often resulting in them dropping out of school due to early marriage.

This reality contrasts with the legal framework established by the state, particularly Article 7, Paragraph (1) of Law Number 16 of 2019, an amendment to Law Number 1 of 1974 on Marriage (UU16/2019). The law stipulates that marriage is only permitted if both parties, male and female, have reached the age of 19. Despite this regulation, many parents continue to violate the law, often compelled by circumstances such as unplanned pregnancies. To avoid public shame and family dishonor, parents marry off their children as soon as possible, even if this decision negatively affects the psychological and mental health of the child.

Max Weber's analysis of social actions provides a framework for understanding these behaviors. Weber's theory posits that every social action is an individual's behavior shaped by norms, habits, values, and other factors encapsulated within the concept of social facts (Suryani & Kudus, 2022). Early childhood marriages, viewed through this lens, are individual actions performed without full awareness, often as a spontaneous reaction to uncontrollable events. These marriages frequently fail to align with the intended purposes of marriage itself.

Social actions concerning early childhood marriages are part of broader societal phenomena that disregard the state's legal framework on marriage age. Why does this happen? It stems from impulsive events such as unplanned pregnancies or societal pressure, where children feel compelled to marry due to shame or fear of judgment, leading to conscious but emotionally driven decisions.

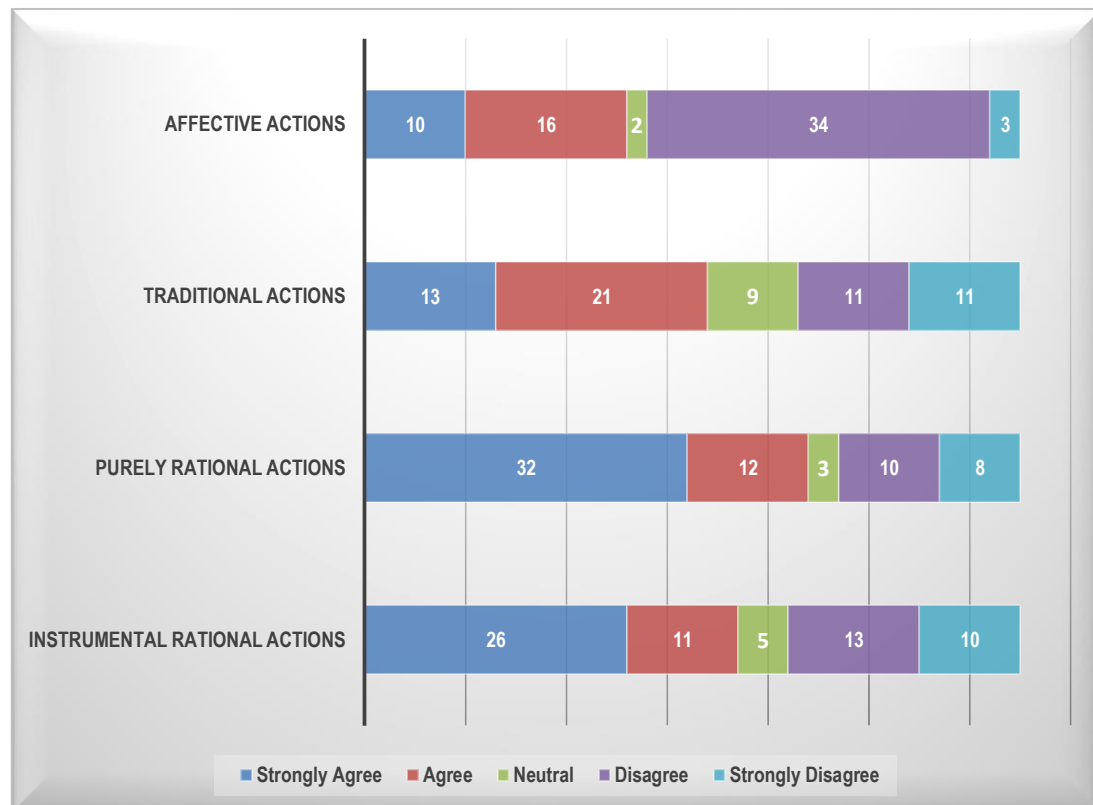


Figure 1. Parental Social Actions in Early Childhood Marriages

4.2. Impacts of Early Childhood Marriages on Couples

In the era of globalization, societal dynamics have become increasingly influenced by advancements in knowledge, technology, social media, and cultural shifts. Generation Z, known for its reliance on internet-based technology and smartphones, is constantly exposed to various forms of information, including issues surrounding early childhood marriages. These topics have become a frequent subject of discussion within the Makassar community.

Early childhood marriage is no longer an unfamiliar issue for the people of Makassar. Instead, it has become an integral part of the societal environment that contributes to its prevalence, often due to free social interactions. With a dense population of 1,424,368, Makassar creates a social setting where individual interactions are unavoidable.

This reality is supported by field observations indicating that the dense population fosters symbolic interactions, leading to phenomena such as premarital pregnancies, which often result in early marriages. These circumstances impose significant social challenges on the individuals and their families. The unplanned nature of these events frequently catches families off guard, leaving them to address the social repercussions.

In parallel, arranged marriages by parents remain common, as some informants noted, reflecting the evolving social life within cultural traditions. Communities in the outskirts of Makassar, comprising multi-ethnic populations who migrate for work, frequently arrange or marry off their children, even when they are underage. This multi-ethnic context, combined with population growth and the expansion of local cultural norms, is a significant factor contributing to the high rates of early childhood marriages in Makassar.

Local cultural paradigms often perpetuate the acceptance of early marriages, even for children under the legal marriage age. Traditional leaders in these communities often lack the authority or capacity to regulate cultural systems effectively to deter early marriages. As a

result, social actions related to this phenomenon reinforce its persistence, reflecting broader societal acceptance and the inability of cultural institutions to adapt to contemporary legal and social expectations.

4.2.1. Positive Impacts

This study also identifies positive impacts experienced by early marriage couples, including:

1) Independence

Independence is a character trait that typically develops as individuals reach maturity. However, this trait can emerge at a younger age if the individual successfully navigates life challenges, as reflected in respondents' questionnaire responses. The following indicators illustrate the independence observed in these young couples:

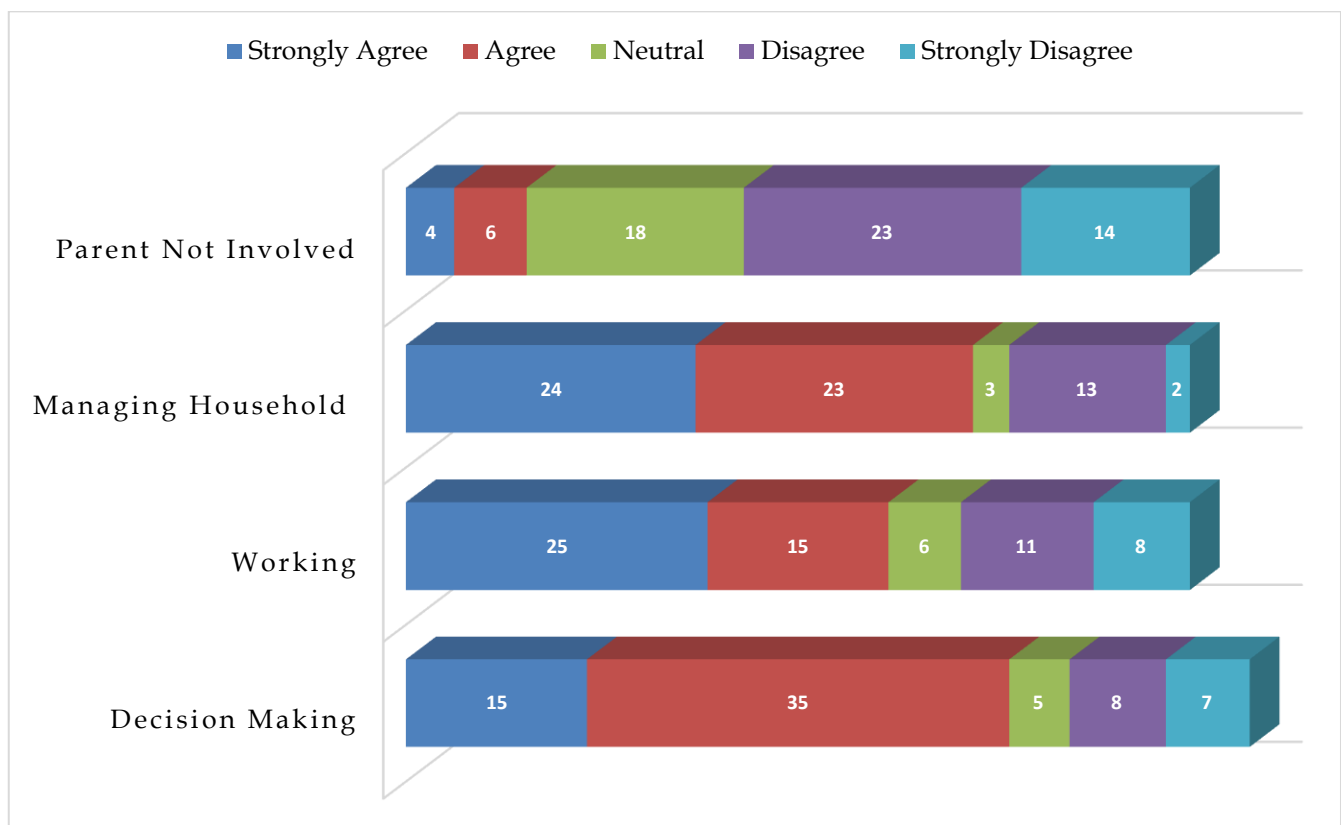


Figure 2. Independence Among Children

Socio-economic conditions can influence the phenomenon of independence among these young couples. Informants noted differences in behavior before and after early marriage. One key informant, identified as Baco, explained:

"Initially, my child didn't have a stable job and relied on us to meet daily needs. However, after marriage, they became independent and responsible for their family."
(Personal Communication, 2024)

This statement indicates that their children began to exhibit independence and no longer required parental assistance after marrying, even at a young age. They were willing to work diligently and contribute to supporting the economic needs of their families.

2) Maturity

Maturity is characterized by the ability to prioritize important matters, which reflects emotional and decision-making growth. This characteristic is illustrated in the following diagram:

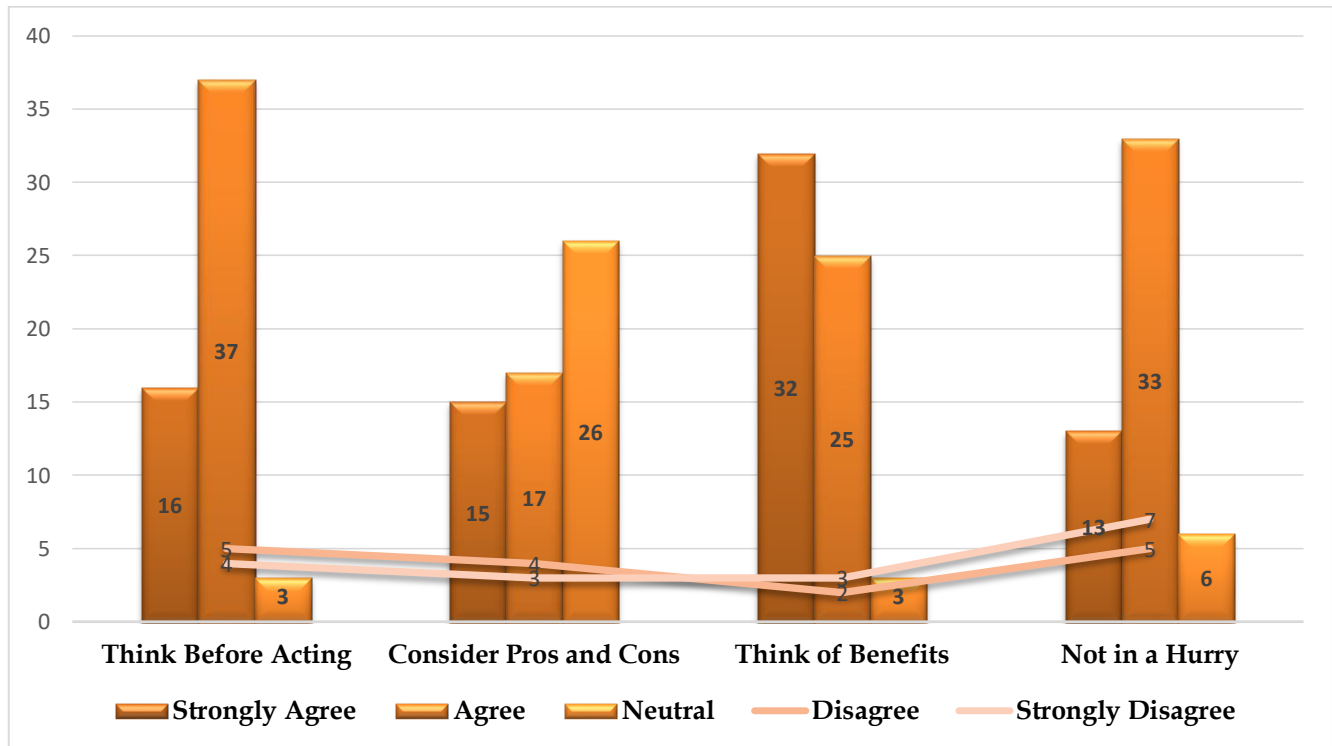


Figure 3. Maturity Traits

As shown in Figure 3, most respondents agreed or strongly agreed that early marriage positively impacted their children by fostering maturity. Few respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed. Thus, it can be concluded that parents perceive early marriage as having a positive effect, helping their children become more mature.

3) Responsibility

Responsibility is a trait closely associated with maturity, another positive impact of early marriage. While many young individuals lack this trait and spend their youth seeking identity and engaging in leisure, they often embrace responsibilities once assigned to them. This transformation is illustrated in the following diagram:

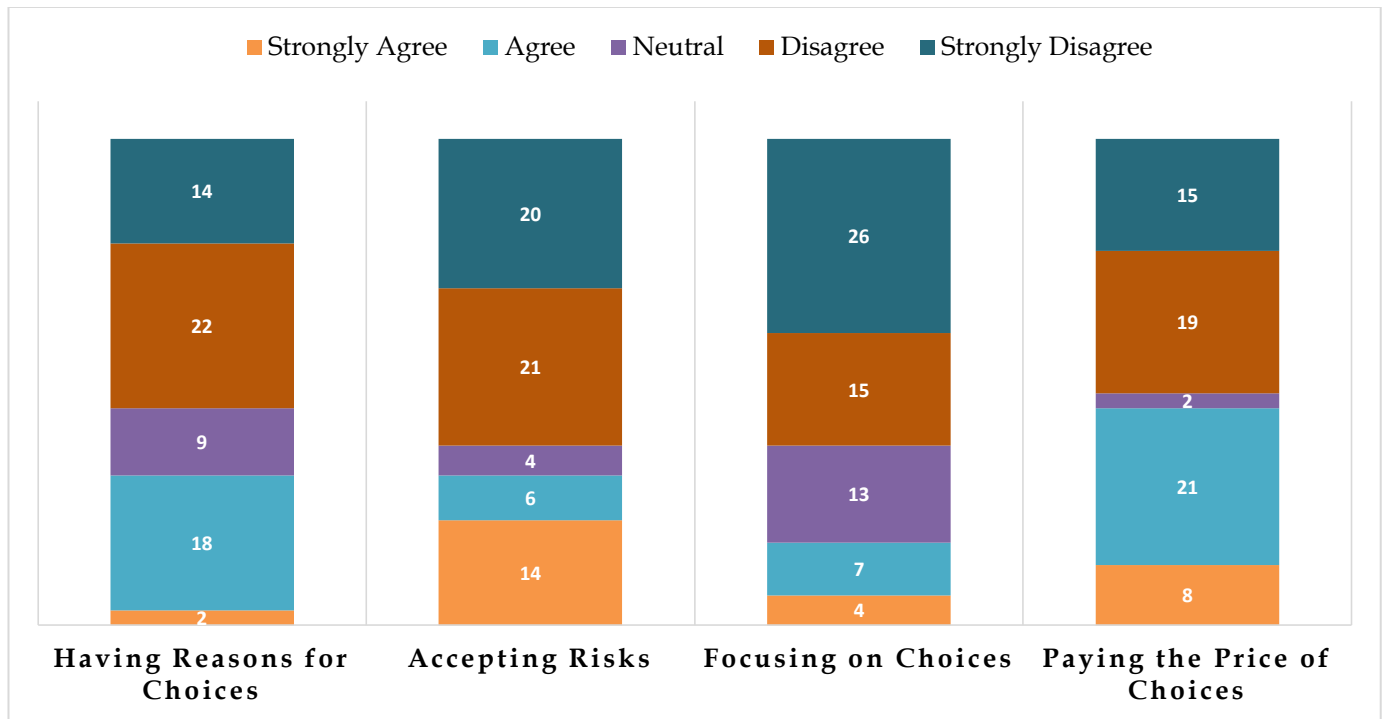


Figure 4. Responsibility Traits

Figure 4 represents the variable “responsibility” through four indicators. Respondents’ answers indicate that their children have fulfilled these responsibilities and demonstrated the ability to manage them. As a result, it can be concluded that these young individuals have exhibited responsibility within their marriages.

4.2.2. Negative Impacts

In some cases, early marriages do not proceed as hoped by the parents, with many resulting in conflicts and even divorce. These negative outcomes are further explained below:

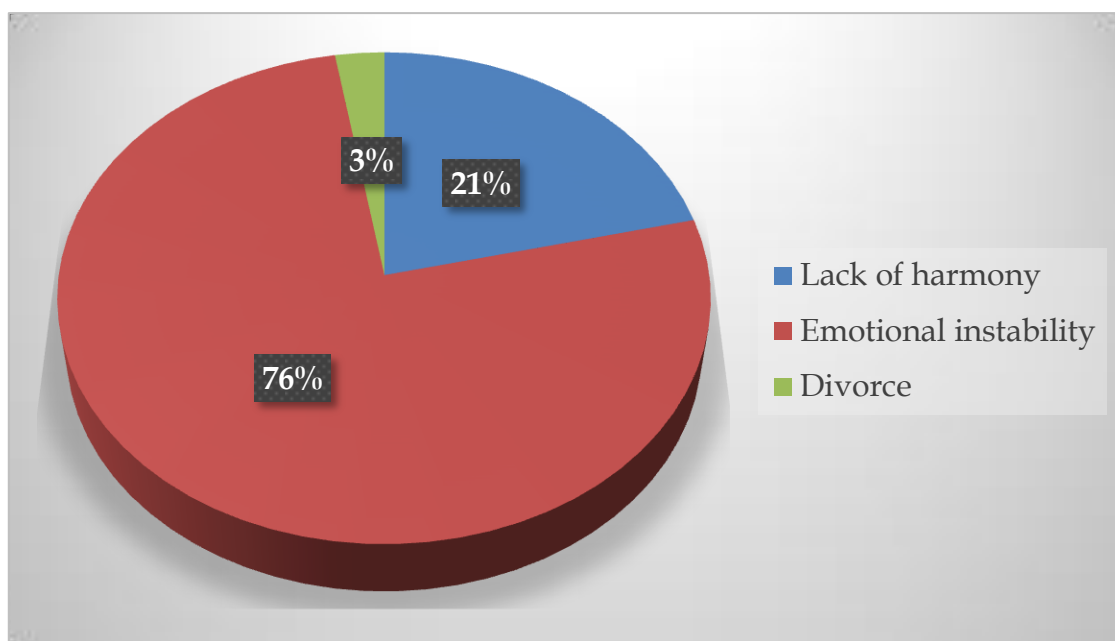


Figure 5. Negative Impacts of Early Age Marriage

1) Family Disharmony

This is one of the most common issues in newly formed marriages. Young couples often begin to reveal their true personalities, with ego conflicts becoming dominant. One informant described this situation:

"The children knew and liked each other, so we let them marry. But in their married life, their true personalities surfaced. Some couldn't handle it and slept in separate rooms, hiding from their spouse or staying with their parents or friends." (Personal Communication, 2024)

This statement highlights the frequent occurrence of family disharmony in early marriages, which can significantly affect the stability of the household.

2) Emotional Instability

Emotional instability is another common issue among early marriage couples. Factors contributing to this include dominant egos due to their young age, school-level education, and emotional immaturity. An informant, a parent of an early marriage couple, explained:

"The children often argue, blame each other, and refuse to compromise. As a new couple, it's quite common." (Personal Communication, 2024)

This statement reflects early marriage couples' emotional challenges rooted in their lack of maturity and readiness for family life.

3) Divorce

Divorce is often the outcome of many early marriages. This is usually due to the couple's inability to manage emotional outbursts or the interference of external family members in their household affairs, which creates tension. One informant shared:

"When parents interfere and try to control their children's household, it often disturbs them. That indicates persistent problems that usually lead to divorce." (Personal Communication, 2024)

This insight reveals how external interference often disrupts the internal dynamics of early marriage couples, ultimately leading to marital breakdowns.

5. Discussion

Early childhood marriage in South Sulawesi has been practiced for generations, even during the era of local kingdoms. Traditionally, parents arranged marriages for their children based on lineage considerations, such as descendants of noble families, wealthy individuals, rulers, or influential figures. In contemporary times, early marriage persists, albeit with a more open rationale. While past justifications centered on family reputation, today's reasons are more frequently economic, particularly among lower-class families in rural and urban areas.

From Max Weber's perspective on social actions (Halim et al., 2018), these reasons constitute social actions. Social actions are defined as deliberate acts by individuals directed toward others, facilitating interaction and communication. Such actions are often intended to control individual behavior and engage in subjective communication. Weber's analysis of early

childhood marriage emphasizes the interplay between individual actions and societal relationships, highlighting how individuals strive to meet their needs and interact with others.

Weber categorizes social actions into four types:

1) Instrumental Rational Actions

These actions are driven by careful consideration to achieve specific goals. Based on this study's findings, instrumental rational actions include parental and economic factors. Parents carefully evaluate the potential outcomes of marrying off their children, often driven by concerns about their children's social interactions, particularly the risks of free relationships. Parents seek to supervise their children and avoid undesirable outcomes that could affect the family's reputation in the local community.

2) Purely Social Actions

These actions are rationally directed toward achieving specific objectives. Weber identifies four key elements of value-oriented actions:

- Actions aimed at imparting meaning or knowledge to others.
- Actions imbued with subjective meaning and carried out with conscious conviction.
- Actions with distinct characteristics are directed toward others in response to specific events.
- Structured actions are designed to achieve a final goal.

3) Affective Actions

These actions are dominated by emotions or feelings rather than intellectual reflection or conscious planning.

4) Traditional Actions

These actions are rooted in customs and traditions passed down through generations and continue to influence behavior today (B. S. Turner, 1983).

In analyzing the cases of early childhood marriage presented in this study, Weber's framework provides insights into the motives and interests of parents. These motives may include economic, political, religious, or social status factors. In many cases, these motives are mixed, such as a combination of economic and social status motives or religious and economic motives.

This phenomenon is common across Indonesia regarding the impacts of early childhood marriage. However, the negative effects on young couples vary in intensity and frequency, depending on the variables analyzed. These variables include education, socio-economic conditions, and age. The variation in impacts influences government policies on early childhood marriage, such as setting a minimum marriage age for women.

To gain a more comprehensive understanding, future research should extend to specific populations, such as religious or professional groups, to examine the applicability of social actions across diverse contexts. Additional variables like education, socio-economic conditions, and age would further enrich the analysis and contribute to more effective policymaking.

6. Conclusion

Social actions related to early childhood marriage have remained fundamentally consistent, though societal tendencies have shifted, influencing changes like these social actions. Traditionally, philosophical characteristics predominantly shaped society, resulting in value-

rational actions. However, societal actions have largely transitioned to instrumental-rational ones in the modern, materialistic era.

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8. Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors have declared no potential conflicts of interest concerning this article's research, authorship, and/or publication.

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