



## Islamic Law and Local Traditions in Preventing Early Marriage in the Toraja Muslim Minority Community

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### ABSTRACT

The enforcement of women's rights concerning the restriction of polygamy during the *iddah* period following divorce poses a significant challenge in Islamic family law, particularly among minority Muslim communities such as Tana Toraja. This issue reflects a broader tension between the principles of Islamic law and the influence of local cultural practices. Despite existing legal frameworks aimed at safeguarding women's rights, there remains a critical research gap in understanding how these frameworks operate in culturally distinct minority contexts. This study employs a comprehensive legal methodology, combining qualitative interviews with stakeholders from the local Religious Affairs Office, including religious leaders and legal practitioners, alongside document analysis of legal rulings, policies, and relevant literature. The findings reveal that local cultural norms often conflict with Islamic legal principles, exacerbated by limited legal awareness within the community and insufficient institutional enforcement mechanisms. These impediments hinder the effective application of Islamic family law and the protection of women's rights. To address these challenges, this study proposes two key strategies: (1) enhancing legal education programs tailored to the unique cultural contexts of minority Muslim communities and (2) strengthening oversight and enforcement mechanisms through collaboration among local authorities, religious leaders, and community organizations. By bridging the gap between Islamic legal principles and local cultural practices, these recommendations aim to promote a more inclusive and effective enforcement of women's rights within minority Muslim settings.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In Tana Toraja, a region with a predominantly non-Muslim population in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, the Muslim minority community faces challenges in navigating between strong local traditions and Islamic teachings, particularly concerning early marriage practices (Takdir et al., 2023). The phenomenon of early marriage has become a central issue, triggering social, cultural, and religious debates (Zulfa et al., 2024). Local traditions in Toraja emphasize financial and emotional readiness before marriage, often symbolized by the ability to "circle the kitchen seven times," representing independence and readiness for family life (De Jong, n.d.). On the other hand, early marriage is frequently seen as a solution to avoid premarital relationships or to preserve family honor when a girl becomes pregnant out of wedlock. This situation creates a dilemma for the Muslim community in Toraja, which must not only adapt to local customs but also strive to comply with Islamic and national legal provisions (Kamal, 2024; Musthofa & Lutfiah, 2024; Sistiarani et al., 2024).

The rising rate of early marriage in this region poses various issues that transcend cultural and religious boundaries. Data from the Makale District Court indicate that children aged 14–17 dominate early marriage cases in the first semester of 2024, raising concerns about its impact on education, reproductive health, and social welfare (Makale District Court, 2024). Moreover, early marriage often leads to violations of children's rights, obstructs their access to proper education, and exposes them to serious health risks, including complications during childbirth (UNICEF, 2022). In this context, the Muslim minority community in Toraja faces additional challenges, such as social stigmatization and cultural pressures that sometimes conflict with the values of Islamic law.

Previous studies have tended to discuss early marriage issues from health and educational perspectives but have inadequately explored the interaction between strong customary norms and Islamic law within the context of Muslim minority communities (Smith, 2021; Jones, 2019). Moreover, earlier research on early marriage in Indonesia has focused mainly on majority-Muslim regions, overlooking the dynamics of Muslim minorities in areas such as Tana Toraja (Muzakki, 2020; Aminah & Hadi, 2021). Global studies also suggest that early marriage is often linked to socioeconomic factors and cultural norms, but the context of religious minorities has rarely been explored in depth (Yaya et al., 2019; Chauhan et al., 2020). For instance, in Syria, early marriage among refugees is often influenced by poor economic conditions and limited access to education, creating patterns that exacerbate the vulnerability of young women (Van Raemdonck, 2023). Similarly, in Bangladesh, early marriage is perceived as an economic solution for impoverished households, yet it has adverse effects on women's access to education and rights (Saleheen et al., 2021).

The context of early marriage in Toraja highlights distinct complexities. Torajan cultural norms are collectivist, emphasizing the preservation of family honor through mechanisms such as financial and emotional readiness before marriage. In contrast, Islamic law emphasizes individual readiness based on specific conditions, such as reaching puberty and being capable of taking responsibility (Jurjani, 1983). The disharmony between these two systems significantly challenges efforts to reconcile them, especially when people perceive local customs as violations of universal human rights principles, often incorporated into national policies. For example, in Jordan,

communities frequently use early marriage as a solution for cases of premarital pregnancy. This practice contradicts global efforts to reduce such occurrences through advocacy for women's education. (Mourtada et al., 2017; Harvey et al., 2022).

The primary issue lies in the disharmony between collectivist customary norms, the more individualistic Islamic law, and the lack of systemic support to create inclusive solutions. Public awareness of the long-term impacts of early marriage, whether on health, social, or legal aspects, remains insufficient, further worsening the situation. In countries like India, social pressure to marry daughters for economic reasons often involves compromises on their education and future potential (Kumari & Shekhar, 2023). Therefore, understanding how Muslim minority communities like those in Toraja manage these conflicts while building a human rights-based approach suited to their local context is crucial.

By highlighting the experiences of the Muslim minority community in Toraja, this study seeks to uncover the complex dynamics of the interaction between Islamic law and local traditions in early marriage practices. This phenomenon reflects the normative conflict between custom and religion and illustrates broader challenges in fostering social harmony amidst diverse cultural pressures. In Muslim minority communities, early marriage serves as a testing ground for adapting religious values while preserving the essence of local traditions. This study examines the intersection between Torajan customary norms, prioritizing collectivity and family honor, and Islamic legal principles, emphasizing Furthermore, it examines the extent to which the Muslim minority community can bridge cultural and religious differences in a predominantly non-Muslim area through solutions grounded in social justice, education, and human rights values. These findings are anticipated to contribute theoretically to the global literature on the interplay between law and culture while also serving as a foundation for developing more contextual, adaptive, and inclusive public policies, particularly in regions with religious minority populations.

Argumentatively, this study establishes the significant potential of Muslim minorities to integrate religious and local cultural values as a response to global challenges such as early marriage. Previous research has often focused on majority-Muslim areas, which tend to overlook the realities faced by minority communities in the context of cultural pluralism. By examining the case of Toraja, this study fills a gap in the literature that has not fully explained how cultural and religious interactions in minority areas can offer a unique model of harmony. Its primary contribution lies in a locally-based approach that prioritizes balancing customary practices and religious law as an analytical framework. Additionally, this study offers a new perspective to support policies that are not only oriented toward short-term solutions but also long-term social sustainability through strengthened education, women's empowerment, and community-based advocacy.

## **2. METHODS**

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive-exploratory design to understand the dynamics of the interaction between Islamic law and local traditions in the practice of early marriage in Tana Toraja. The research location, Toraja Regency, was selected due to its strong traditional customs and the presence of a Muslim minority community. This approach allows the researcher to deeply explore the experiences of the Muslim community in navigating conflicts between customary norms and religious teachings within a predominantly non-Muslim environment (Creswell, 2014).

The researchers collected primary data through in-depth interviews with six key informants, including traditional leaders, religious leaders, legal practitioners, and community members with direct experiences related to early marriage practices. They gathered secondary data from legal documents, religious court rulings, customary regulations, and relevant literature on Islamic law and local culture. The researchers selected informants using a purposive sampling technique to ensure their strong relevance to the research topic (Patton, 2002).

The researchers collected data using three main methods. First, they conducted semi-structured interviews to gather informants' perspectives on the relationship between customary norms and Islamic law in the context of early marriage. They designed the interview questions to identify how Muslim communities interpret, accept, or critique customary norms that differ from their religious principles. Second, they carried out participatory observation to directly observe customary ceremonies and social interactions related to early marriage, gaining an in-depth understanding of cultural practices and their implications for the Muslim community. Third, they performed document analysis, examining various legal and cultural sources, including religious court rulings, Torajan customary laws, and other relevant legal and cultural documents, to investigate how Islamic law applies within the framework of local cultural practices.

The collected data was analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analytical process included initial coding, identifying major themes, and interpreting findings based on the relationship between Islamic law and customary norms. The research findings were validated through methodological triangulation, combining data from interviews, observations, and document analysis (Denzin, 1978). Additionally, member checking was conducted by involving informants to confirm the accuracy of the research findings. This approach provides a strong foundation for understanding how the Muslim minority community in Toraja addresses challenges in bridging cultural and religious differences in the practice of early marriage.

### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **The Cultural Roots of Early Marriage in Toraja Regency**

Early marriage is a violation of human rights, with profound physical, intellectual, psychological, and emotional impacts on both boys and girls. It limits their education, employment, personal growth, and autonomy opportunities. Forcing a child into marriage abruptly curtails their childhood and infringes on their fundamental rights, resulting in detrimental consequences (Chauhan et al., 2020). Communities in various regions of South Sulawesi, particularly in Toraja Regency, continue to evolve the concept of early marriage. Torajan traditions maintain early marriage as a practice, expecting girls who have reached menstruation and boys who have started working to marry promptly to avoid disgracing their families. (Abdullah, 2009).

Three primary types of marriage are recognized in Toraja, though different cultures may have additional acceptable forms. These include (i) customary marriage, (ii) Islamic marriage, and (iii) Christian marriage. All types are celebrated with festivities and the exchange of gifts. In customary marriage, the bride receives gifts from the groom, which in Islamic terms is akin to the "*mahr*" or dowry. This exchange symbolizes the groom's respect and ability to provide for the bride. Among these, customary marriage is the most common and is often practiced in rural areas, governed by the traditional customs of specific ethnic groups (Abubakari et al., 2024).

Torajan society generally views early marriage unfavorably. Martina, a traditional leader in Toraja, explained that families feel ashamed of early marriage because Torajan society expects individuals to marry only when they can "circle the kitchen seven times," a metaphor representing financial and emotional readiness to support a family. Sampe, a religious leader, supported this view, stating that early marriage in Toraja typically stems from concerns about modern social interactions and parental fears of adolescent premarital relationships.

In current Torajan traditions, early marriage contradicts cultural values, particularly the importance of preserving family honor. According to Bukhari (2024), head of the local Religious Affairs Office (KUA), early marriage in Toraja is not rooted in traditional or cultural practices but often results from past practices such as "*mapparampo*," a customary marriage recognized locally but not legally or religiously valid. Such marriages often lead to complications in later years.

Torajan society continues to uphold ancestral values and traditions, including maintaining family honor in cases involving early marriage. The culture emphasizes independence, discouraging early marriage as it reflects an inability to fulfill family responsibilities, whether economic or emotional. Therefore, people in Toraja generally attribute early marriage to social concerns rather than cultural traditions.

From the perspective of customary roles and traditions, early marriage resulting from premarital relationships is carried out to preserve family honor. According to Syamsul (2024), deputy chair of the Toraja Religious Court, early marriage is often conducted as a form of marriage dispensation for pregnancies outside of wedlock, providing a solution to the issues faced. Early marriage due to premarital relationships is also viewed as social insurance for girls, ensuring they have a responsible spouse. These marriages are typically accompanied by elaborate traditional rituals involving extended family members and the community, reflecting the importance of marriage in Torajan life (Bawono, 2020; Zhang et al., 2020; Fan & Koski, 2022).

In Torajan society, early marriage is considered a strong social norm. Marriage between a man and a woman is viable if both are deemed capable of working. Preserving Torajan cultural values in marriage practices is vital to avoid disgrace and maintain family honor. The primary aim of early marriage in Toraja is to ensure the continuation of traditions and cultural values, which are considered individual social responsibilities. Additionally, familial ties from early marriage often occur among closely related families, such as first cousins (Bawono et al., 2022).

Early marriage is a common occurrence in various countries. In Syria, for instance, especially in rural areas, early marriage is often attributed to a lack of protection, poor economic conditions, and disrupted education for girls (Mourtada et al., 2017). Van Raemdonck (2023) adds that the crisis among Syrian refugees has led to an increase in early marriages among those crossing borders into Jordan. Similarly, in India, despite a reduction in child marriage rates, the practice persists and is deeply rooted in complex religious, traditional, and cultural practices (Kumari & Shekhar, 2023).

Saleheen et al. (2021) confirmed factors contributing to early marriage among women in Bangladesh, Ghana, and Iraq, highlighting key influences such as the household head's education level, wealth status, mass media exposure, household size, and residence location. The likelihood of early marriage was significantly higher among women without formal education or only primary education compared to those with secondary or higher education. Harvey et al. (2022) also identified drivers of child marriage, including poverty, lack of education, crises, social norms,

power structures, gender inequality, paternal characteristics, and societal expectations for early marriage.

Early marriage is often an economic survival strategy for impoverished families, as it reduces the number of individuals needing to be fed, clothed, and educated (Yaya et al., 2019). When society primarily views women as wives, mothers, and homemakers with limited career opportunities or access to education, it increases the financial burden on low-income families and further hampers children's schooling (Mirzaee et al., 2021).

Lack of awareness about the consequences of early marriage remains a significant factor behind its prevalence worldwide. Governments must take proactive steps to reduce child marriage by promoting women's education and using media campaigns to raise awareness about the harmful effects of early marriage, particularly for girls from low-income families.

### **Factors Influencing Early Marriage Practices in Toraja**

Concerns over social interactions and fears of premarital relationships influence early marriage practices in Toraja. Based on interviews conducted with Syamsul (2024), it was explained that premarital relationships predominantly cause early marriage in Toraja. Girls who become pregnant outside of marriage are often granted marriage dispensations under urgent circumstances to protect the individuals involved. This finding diverges from previous studies, which suggested that early marriage in Toraja could occur due to reasons such as achieving social status, a desire to have children, financial benefits, poverty (Schaffnit et al., 2019), social traditions, withdrawal of girls from education, the influence of social media, parental beliefs, family problems, religious convictions, migration (Saleh et al., 2022), a desire to control daughters, adherence to social rules, and gender perceptions (Hosseini & Asadisarvestani, 2022). The decision for early marriage may be made by themselves, by family decision, peer pressure, or social pressure. In underdeveloped countries, men are often dominant in marriage decisions as they are considered the primary breadwinners (Bhattarai et al., 2022).

Furthermore, communities in Toraja attribute early marriage practices to low levels of education. In interviews, Sampe (2024) explained that communities practicing early marriage in Toraja often have low educational attainment. This observation aligns with previous studies showing that early marriage frequently results from a lack of knowledge about women's rights, reproductive health, and related topics (Haniah, 2024). Additionally, limited opportunities for women to work or pursue careers drive early marriage in Toraja, as families view marriage as a solution for escaping poverty. Paty Tandirerung (2024) revealed in interviews that families commonly marry off underage girls who are unemployed and have reached menstruation to support their household economies. In decision-making, families often regard women as assets who must be married off quickly to preserve family honor, significantly limiting their autonomy in making crucial life decisions.

Social perspectives on early marriage vary based on sociocultural characteristics. For instance, in certain parts of Iran, unmarried girls aged 15–17 are stigmatized, labeled as spinsters, and questioned by society about potential issues preventing their marriage (Mirzaee et al., 2021b). In some cultures, families interpret physical changes during puberty as a sign that children are ready for marriage. Additionally, they often view marriage as a religious obligation, believing that early

marriage protects young girls. In other countries, early marriage may be preferred for reasons such as financial benefits from marrying off daughters (through practices like dowries) and reducing family expenses by marrying them early (Baysak et al., 2021; Malik et al., 2022; Pettoello-Mantovani, 2024; Sarfo et al., 2024).

In Toraja, early marriage is often viewed as negatively impacting the family, mainly the couple involved. According to interviews with Martina Palaikan (2024), Torajan culture places great importance on ensuring individuals, particularly women, attain higher levels of education. Torajan people value learning deeply, and they perceive early marriage as violating the cultural and moral values embedded in their traditions, which emphasize education for all members of society, including women. It contradicts studies suggesting that parents may arrange early marriages for their children to secure family support or receive assets from the groom's family (Elmira et al., 2024). Such assumptions conflict with Torajan customs, which emphasize modesty and discourage placing the financial burden of traditional ceremonies such as "*rambu solo*" entirely on the groom's family.

Based on research by Tao et al. (2021), early marriage can also affect the well-being of parents for various reasons. First, parents rely on their children's families for old-age care and other needs. Second, in many developing countries, traditional cultures hold that children should marry once they reach a certain age. This cultural concept gradually evolves into informal institutions recognized by society (Jin et al., 2015). Early marriage often gives parents a sense that they have adhered to prevailing social norms.

In Indonesia, traditional marriage customs typically involve patrilocal, matrilocality, and neolocal residence patterns (Elmira et al., 2024). In patrilocal (or virilocal) systems, couples live with the husband's family after marriage, a practice observed among ethnic groups such as the Betawi, Banjar, and Manado. In matrilocality (or uxorilocal) systems, couples live with the wife's family after marriage, as seen among the Minangkabau, Torajan, and Bugis groups. In ambilocality systems, such as among the Macassarese, couples may choose to reside with either the husband's or wife's family. Finally, in neolocal systems, as seen among the Javanese, newlywed couples establish their residence separate from both families (Rammohan & Johar, 2009).

Customs and traditions are strong reasons for practicing early marriage; for example, traditional values such as preserving virginity before marriage (Motamedi et al., 2016) and societal pressure to prevent girls from becoming sexually active before marriage prompt parents to marry off their daughters at an early age. Parents may also fear that failing to marry their children within social expectations could make them unmatchable in the future (Matlabi, 2013).

### **Cultural and Islamic Law Harmonization in the Practice of Early Marriage in Tana Toraja**

Cultural values often intersect with early marriage practices. In many countries, poverty and gender discrimination emerge as the primary drivers of early marriage. Discriminatory attitudes linked to women's lack of economic independence, limited access to employment, and unfavorable economic conditions perpetuate cycles of poverty (Ghoroghchian et al., 2024). Additionally, Nawawi et al. (2022) highlight that in specific national contexts, early marriage aligns with religious and legal frameworks, where these elements are harmonized to include protective measures for citizens.

Early marriage significantly affects children's educational opportunities (Delprato & Akyeampong, 2017), often disrupting their continuing education prospects (Wubet et al., 2024). After marriage, underage girls face substantial challenges in pursuing formal and informal education due to household responsibilities, childbearing, and societal beliefs that marriage and education are incompatible (Kanji et al., 2024).

An inverse relationship exists between early marriage and education. Gender inequalities significantly affect girls' education (Reinholds, 2019). Early marriage and motherhood often cause girls in developing countries to drop out of school, which reduces their access to education and limits their employment opportunities (Lloyd et al., 2008).

Kidman et al. (2024) highlight that child marriage is widely recognized as a human rights violation. Girls married before 18 have limited opportunities to continue their education, significantly impacting their economic potential and independence. Child marriage often forces girls to leave school, thereby limiting their educational and career opportunities (Fang et al., 2024; Paul et al., 2023).

A lack of access to education has been identified in the literature as a major driver of child marriage (Psaki et al., 2021). For many adolescent girls, early marriage may appear to be a better option for their future than continuing education, mainly when opportunities for productive employment are scarce (Soler-Hampejsek et al., 2021). Regardless of the causes, child marriage disrupts girls' education and is closely linked to poor economic outcomes and persistent poverty among women (Parsons et al., 2015).

Furthermore, Naik et al. (2024) explain that adolescents who marry early often leave school to manage household and childcare responsibilities. It severely limits their opportunities to pursue higher education (Delprato et al., 2015; Osborne et al., 2024). Even if adolescents remain in school after marriage, their academic performance declines due to the burden of new family responsibilities (Khalil, 2024).

The concept of marriage is deeply rooted in traditions, often referred to as *al-'urf*. Early marriage should be examined as a cultural practice through the lenses of *al-'urf* (customs) and *al-maslahah* (public interest). *Al-'urf* encompasses behaviors that promote social harmony and are rationally accepted by society (Jurjani, 1983). In the context of early marriage, *al-'urf* and *al-maslahah* can contribute to achieving such practices' goals. For instance, *al-'urf* can guide decision-making regarding early marriage and preserve cultural values, while *al-maslahah* encourages positive social change (Anwar Sadat, 2023).

The concepts of *al-'urf* and *al-maslahah* in Islamic law are essential for ensuring that early marriage does not violate Islamic principles, such as actions based on inner peace, sound reasoning, and societal acceptance (Sunnah, 1947). Early marriage, in this context, is permissible in Islam as long as the prospective spouses meet religious criteria, including maturity (*baligh*) and accountability. However, Islam advises that marriage should ideally occur when individuals are physically, mentally, and financially prepared. According to the principles of *al-maslahah*, four key criteria must: (1) *al-maslahah* serves as an independent argument, (2) it applies specifically to social and cultural matters, and (3) reasoning is employed to assess its benefits and drawbacks (Anwar Sadat, 2023).

In the context of early marriage traditions in Toraja, *\*al-‘urf\** reflects the customs and traditions developed within the community. The local belief that early marriage can help avoid undesirable consequences is rooted in shared experiences, and narratives passed down through generations. Conversely, *al-maslahah* emphasizes the benefits or welfare of families engaging in early marriage practices.

The harmonization of religion and culture in early marriage often explains individuals' tendencies to avoid conflict. However, harmony and conflict avoidance rarely undergo systematic analysis (Leung et al., 2011). Banban (2018) suggests that achieving harmony requires acknowledging and respecting differences. Harmony, in this context, is a sense of cultural tolerance and coexistence that encompasses diverse belief systems and traditions, enabling peaceful coexistence within shared social spaces.

In conclusion, harmonizing cultural values and Islamic law in early marriage practices in Toraja provides a framework for addressing the challenges posed by these practices. By integrating *al-‘urf* and *al-maslahah*, these traditions can align with modern societal priorities, such as education, gender equality, and human rights, ensuring that cultural heritage is preserved while fostering sustainable and inclusive solutions.

### **Solutions and Policies to Address Early Marriage in Toraja**

Comprehensive education for women and families in Toraja is a fundamental step in preventing early marriage, which remains a significant challenge in the local community. Education should not merely provide information but also shape societal mindsets and perceptions about the long-term impacts of this practice. In the context of Toraja, many families still view early marriage as a practical solution to various social issues, such as fears of premarital relationships or economic pressures, without considering its broader risks. Furthermore, low levels of education among young women often hinder their understanding of their rights, including the right to delay marriage until they are physically, emotionally, and financially prepared. With limited access to inclusive education and programs supporting women's empowerment, early marriage continues to be perceived as an accepted social norm. Therefore, educational initiatives must encompass various aspects, from accessible formal education to skill development programs designed to empower women to actively contribute to society and make better decisions for their future.

Local values such as "*gotong royong*" (cooperation), respect for family, and appreciation for education can serve as a foundation for transforming societal perceptions of women's roles and the importance of education. These values have long been integral to Torajan culture, but modernization and social pressures have eroded their implementation in daily life. Linking education with local traditions can be a strategic approach to fostering community awareness without triggering resistance to value changes.

Previous research has demonstrated that integrating local values into education effectively increases community participation in supporting social change. For example, indigenous values have been incorporated into educational curricula in the Philippines to address early marriage issues and promote gender equality in rural communities (Soler-Hampejsek et al., 2021). In Toraja, "*rambu solo*" traditions can reinforce cultural identity and serve as educational platforms for the community. For instance, this tradition could celebrate high-achieving girls by awarding scholarships for further education. It aligns with initiatives in other parts of Indonesia, such as

Minangkabau, where matrilineal traditions have been utilized to promote women's empowerment through education-based programs.

Thus, integrating local values into Toraja's educational curriculum not only preserves traditional culture but also serves as an effective tool to transform social perceptions of early marriage. This approach can inspire younger generations to value education and reject norms that support early marriage practices.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that, although Torajan traditions have historically rejected early marriage due to their emphasis on financial and emotional readiness as primary prerequisites for marriage, modern social pressures—such as concerns over premarital relationships and the preservation of family honor—have become the primary drivers of this practice. This shift reflects a transformation of traditional values, moving from a collective responsibility orientation toward instant solutions that often contradict customary principles and Islamic law. Education and prevention are key strategies for addressing early marriage, with education playing a central role in raising societal awareness. Comprehensive education, including sex education, women's rights awareness, scholarships, and the integration of local values into educational curricula, shows significant potential in reducing early marriage rates. Traditions such as "*rambu solo*" can be educational platforms to reward high-achieving girls. However, the success of this approach requires strong synergy between the government, traditional communities, and educational institutions to create inclusive and sustainable social transformation.

The primary contribution of this study lies in addressing gaps in the literature concerning how Muslim minority communities in predominantly non-Muslim areas, such as Toraja, navigate the challenges between customary norms and religious law. Through a locally-based approach, this research provides new insights into harmonizing culture and law to develop more contextual and human-rights-based policies. While the findings of this study are locally relevant, their application to other communities requires contextual adaptation to account for cultural and religious differences. Therefore, further research is needed to explore similar dynamics in other regions to expand the relevance of these findings on a national and global scale. This study thus provides a foundation for the development of public policies that not only focus on preventing early marriage but also emphasize women's empowerment and culturally-driven social transformation.

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