

## **Enforcement of Underage Marriage Law in Luwu Regency, South Sulawesi**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study aims to examine the enforcement of underage marriage laws in Luwu Regency. This descriptive qualitative study uses a normative-empirical approach to interview, observation, and documentation methods. The results show that the reality of underage marriages in Luwu Regency is influenced by weak public awareness, lack of serious government supervision or education, and factors such as free association, tradition, family economic background, and patriarchal views. Underage marriage practices based on cultural reasons are subject to a criminal penalty of up to 9 years as outlined in Law No. 12 of 2022 on Sexual Violence Crimes, Article 10, Paragraph (1) and (2). The enforcement of underage marriage follows the legal framework of Law No. 16 of 2019, considering the minimum marriage age, and the Supreme Court Regulation No. 5 of 2019 regarding guidelines for adjudicating marriage dispensation requests. Substantively, underage marriage, from a traditional perspective, aims to preserve lineage rather than prioritize material concerns.

**Keywords:** Underage Marriage; Child Marriage; Marriage Dispensation.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The phenomenon of child marriage is not only viewed through the aspect of electronic media. Still, it can also be examined based on the ancestors' customs (tradition), particularly in South Sulawesi, Luwu Regency, which is rooted in a classical understanding. Through the researcher's observation, one of the reasons parents marry off their children at a young age is not only because of premarital pregnancy but also as an effort by each family to strengthen familial ties (Darwis et al., 2024). However, this practice is no longer as relevant in this region in the modern era, as many other factors can strengthen family relationships and connections. Salam (2017) states that the customary law in the Buton region considers child marriage impermissible without a valid reason. Still, conversely, child marriage is allowed from the perspective of national law and Islamic Law Codification.

Child marriage, often based on cultural traditions, is a significant issue that requires strict preventive regulations. According to the Sexual Violence Crime Law, individuals who force child marriage under the pretext of cultural reasons can face up to 9 years of imprisonment. Although there are regulations such as Law No. 16 of 2019, which sets the minimum marriage age at 19, the practice of granting marriage dispensations for minors is still often considered a legal solution, despite potentially causing legal discrepancies with laws protecting children, health, and human rights (Fausi & Asmuni, 2024). This study highlights the imbalance between the implementation of child marriage laws and child protection laws, as well as the government's efforts to provide education and healthcare services related to child marriage (Hanafi, 2024).

Child marriage in Indonesia, especially in South Sulawesi, has become an increasingly concerning issue. According to data from the Central Bureau of Statistics, approximately 1,220,900 children in Indonesia are involved in child marriage, making Indonesia one of the countries with the highest rates of child marriage. The impact of child marriage is substantial, as it deprives children of their fundamental rights, such as the right to grow and develop properly. Therefore, there needs to be more attention from the government to regulate and address child marriage practices, not only through legal aspects but also through education, health, and raising public awareness to reduce the prevalence of child marriage.

This study addresses the issue of the minimum marriage age regulated in Law No. 16 of 2019 and its application, which is often neglected in the practices of society. Unlike previous studies, such as Sri Rahmawati's work comparing Islamic and positive law, this research develops a broader analysis. Additionally, the studies by Halilah (2022) and Judiasih et al. (2020), which focus on marriage dispensations granted by judges, serve as a comparison. However, this study also includes a review from the perspective of the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA).

Previous research by Mulyadi & Nugraheni (2017) highlighted judges' considerations in granting marriage dispensations for minors, focusing on the

evidence presented in court. In contrast, this study covers court rulings and involves an analysis from the perspectives of fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) and customary law. Judiasih et al. (2020) research examines the contradiction between marriage dispensations and efforts to minimize early marriage, which is relevant for comparing policies with their social impacts. Additionally, Simanjourang's study on underage marriage from a cultural perspective enriches the context of this study, which integrates legal views with local traditions.

This research examines the issue of child marriage in Luwu Regency, South Sulawesi, using three legal perspectives: legislation, Islamic law, and customary law, offering a novelty compared to previous studies. Cultural, economic, and patriarchal factors are the leading causes of early marriage practices, despite being contrary to Law No. 16 of 2019. Using a normative-empirical approach, this study analyzes the interaction between formal law and local traditions, as well as the role of the Office of Religious Affairs in marriage dispensations. The academic contribution of this study lies in integrating different legal perspectives, offering recommendations to improve supervision and education involving customary institutions and religious leaders in preventing early marriage and aligning the law with local traditions to protect children's rights.

## **METHODS**

This research uses a qualitative type of research that is descriptive and is conducted through several methods, including observation. The observation data collection technique is used to observe the phenomena or human behaviors related to the issue of child marriage in the Luwu Regency. In conducting this research, the researcher uses a normative-empirical approach aimed at normative studies of the prevailing regulations in Indonesia. In addition, this study also analyzes and examines cultural practices regarding the phenomenon of child marriage, which occurs due to traditional habits that are not based on the child's developmental perspective.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Reality of Child Marriage in Luwu Regency**

Divorce is one of the increasing social issues in modern society. This phenomenon is influenced by various factors, including the change in people's lifestyles that increasingly lead to a hedonistic lifestyle (Sa'adah et al., 2024). Hedonism, which focuses on the search for pleasure and instant personal gratification, often leads to imbalances in domestic relationships. According to Kraus (2020), this lifestyle encourages individuals to prioritize worldly desires, such as luxury, entertainment, and self-indulgence, without regard for long-term responsibilities in marriage. In households, hedonic lifestyles are often a source of conflict between couples. Excessive consumptive patterns can result in serious financial problems, while a lack of communication and a mismatch of values between spouses can worsen the situation. Many couples caught up in this lifestyle

find it challenging to maintain a healthy relationship, resulting in divorce being the chosen way out.

Child marriage in Luwu Regency is a prevalent issue within the community. This is caused by several factors that force children to enter marriage before reaching adulthood. In light of the widespread occurrence of child marriage, the researcher outlines several factors contributing to child marriage and also discusses the impact of child marriage through interviews with individuals involved in child marriage and several sources from the Religious Affairs Office in Luwu Regency, as well as perspectives from P2TP2A (Women's Empowerment and Child Protection) of Luwu Regency. Furthermore, the researcher presents data collected from the number of marriage dispensation requests compiled by the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Luwu Regency from 2022 to 2023 as follows:

**Table 1.** Data on the Number of Child Marriages in Luwu Regency for the Years 2022-2023

| No           | Sub-district      | 2022             |                    | 2023             |                    |
|--------------|-------------------|------------------|--------------------|------------------|--------------------|
|              |                   | Male (<19 years) | Female (<19 years) | Male (<19 years) | Female (<19 years) |
| 1            | Larompong         | -                | 2                  | 2                | 5                  |
| 2            | Larompong Selatan | -                | -                  | -                | 1                  |
| 3            | Suli Barat        | 2                | 7                  | -                | 1                  |
| 4            | Suli              | -                | 5                  | -                | -                  |
| 5            | Belopa            | 1                | 1                  | 1                | 2                  |
| 6            | Belopa Utara      | 1                | -                  | -                | -                  |
| 7            | Kamanre           | -                | -                  | -                | 1                  |
| 8            | Bajo              | 1                | 1                  | -                | 8                  |
| 9            | Bajo Barat        | -                | 1                  | 1                | 4                  |
| 10           | Latimojong        | -                | 1                  | 1                | 2                  |
| 11           | Bastem            | -                | 4                  | -                | -                  |
| 12           | Bastem Utara      | -                | -                  | 2                | 2                  |
| 13           | Ponrang Selatan   | -                | 2                  | 1                | 2                  |
| 14           | Ponrang           | -                | 1                  | -                | 1                  |
| 15           | Bupon             | 1                | 1                  | 1                | 3                  |
| 16           | Bua               | -                | 1                  | 1                | 4                  |
| 17           | Walenrang         | 4                | -                  | -                | 1                  |
| 18           | Walenrang Barat   | -                | -                  | -                | -                  |
| 19           | Walenrang Timur   | -                | -                  | 1                | 4                  |
| 20           | Walenrang Utara   | -                | -                  | -                | -                  |
| 21           | Lamasi            | 1                | 4                  | -                | 1                  |
| 22           | Lamasi Timur      | -                | -                  | -                | 1                  |
| <b>Total</b> |                   | 42               |                    | 54               |                    |

**Source:** Ministry of Religious Affairs Office of Luwu Regency (2023)

Table 1 shows the number of marriage dispensation cases collected by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Luwu Regency based on reports from the Religious Affairs Office in Luwu Regency from 2022 to 2023. The data for 2022 indicates that 11 men applied for a marriage dispensation and 30 women in that category. In 2023, the number of men under 19 was 11, which accounts for 20%, and the number of women was 43 cases or 80%. The total number of cases from 2022 to 2023 was 95. This was conveyed by Judge Salim (2023), who stated:

"The reasons underlying the marriage dispensation applications in this Religious Court are due to cases where the party or victim is pregnant out of wedlock. However, we cannot only view it from that aspect. There are also factors of closeness, such as wanting to strengthen family ties, which is why the chosen solution is marriage. Additionally, we found in the trial process that the parents were concerned about their children falling into actions that violate religious norms, in other words, zina (adultery)."

The statement by the Religious Court Judge above indicates that the decision to accept or reject the marriage dispensation applications is based on the Supreme Court Regulation 5 of 2019. The number of marriage dispensation requests in Luwu Regency, obtained by the researcher through (Salim, 2023) interviews, is as follows:

**Table 2.** Marriage Dispensation Data in Luwu Regency for 2019-2022

| <b>Year</b>  | <b>Applicant</b> | <b>Approved</b> | <b>Rejected</b> | <b>Not Accepted</b> | <b>Expired</b> |
|--------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------------|----------------|
| <b>2019</b>  | 81               | 75              | 3               | 1                   | 2              |
| <b>2020</b>  | 67               | 60              | 2               | 3                   | 2              |
| <b>2021</b>  | 69               | 61              | 3               | 1                   | 1              |
| <b>2022</b>  | 35               | 31              | 2               | 1                   | 1              |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>252</b>       | <b>227</b>      | <b>10</b>       | <b>6</b>            | <b>6</b>       |

**Source:** Belopa Religious Court (2023)

Table 2 provides data on marriage dispensation applications in Luwu Regency from 2019 to 2022, showing the total number of applications, approvals, rejections, non-acceptances, and expirations. Overall, from 2019 to 2022, there were 252 applications, 227 approvals, 10 rejections, six non-acceptances, and six expirations, indicating a high approval rate for marriage dispensation requests. This data was sourced from the Belopa Religious Court in 2023. Furthermore, the percentage of child marriage cases in 2022-2023 based on gender is shown in the table below:

**Table 3.** Percentage of Child Marriage Data for 2022-2023

| NO           | Gender | Total     |           | Percentage  |             |
|--------------|--------|-----------|-----------|-------------|-------------|
|              |        | 2022      | 2023      | 2022        | 2023        |
| 1            | Male   | 11        | 11        | 26%         | 20%         |
| 2            | Female | 31        | 43        | 74%         | 80%         |
| <b>TOTAL</b> |        | <b>42</b> | <b>54</b> | <b>100%</b> | <b>100%</b> |

**Source:** Ministry of Religious Affairs Office of Luwu Regency (2024)

The number of child marriage dispensation requests collected by the Ministry of Religious Affairs Office of Luwu Regency, based on data from the Religious Affairs Office in Luwu Regency for 2022, shows that there were 11 male applicants, representing 26%, and 31 female applicants, representing 74%. This data can be compared to 2023, when there was an increase in child marriage requests, with 12 female applicants, while the number of male applicants remained the same as in 2022, with 11 males. The data obtained by the researcher identifies that women are more vulnerable to child marriage, as seen from the higher number compared to men. The phenomenon of child marriage is caused by several factors, as indicated in the interviews conducted by the researcher in Luwu Regency, based on statements from the Head of the Religious Affairs Office (KUA) of South Larompong, Bua, and Belopa sub-districts, who explained that child marriage is influenced by factors such as free association, family economic conditions, and socio-cultural influences.

The reality of dynamics from the Integrated Service Center for Women and Children Empowerment (P2TP2A) of Luwu Regency, based on interviews obtained by the researcher, shows that there were 236 marriage dispensation recommendations requested in the year following the revision of Law No. 1 of 1974 on marriage age limits (Law No. 16 of 2019), up to 2023. Additionally, the information gathered by the researcher revealed that some families or applicants sought recommendations after becoming pregnant outside of marriage to submit them to the Religious Court to obtain a marriage certificate. This effort was made to facilitate the delivery process by the applicable administrative requirements (Pusat Kajian dan Advokasi Perlindungan dan Kualitas Hidup Anak, 2020; Retnowulandari et al., 2024).

To prevent child marriage, P2TP2A Luwu Regency provides counseling and guidance to children to reduce divorce rates, domestic violence, and stunting cases after childbirth. The impact of child marriage related to domestic violence, based on interviews with Marni (2023), shows that about 70% of cases involve adverse effects after choosing to marry underage. In response, P2TP2A Luwu Regency has conducted socialization programs in schools and villages. In these socialization sessions, P2TP2A collaborates with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to raise awareness about the dangers of child marriage.

Furthermore, P2TP2A Luwu Regency has established a children's forum as an extension to provide education to children.

### **Legal Analysis of the Enforcement of Child Marriage Laws in Luwu Regency**

From the perspective of legislation, child marriage can be seen from the provisions outlined in Law No. 16 of 2019, which regulates marriage dispensation. This dispensation is requested by parties who wish to marry underage and requires a letter of recommendation from Child Protection (Sustiono et al., 2022; Bilalu et al., 2022). If the community or individuals involved in child marriage do not have this requirement, they tend to choose to marry through unregistered or informal means. Then, after becoming pregnant, they apply for a marriage dispensation, which is often accepted by the Religious Court (Mursyid et al., 2024; Insani et al., 2024). This occurs frequently due to the difficulty of obtaining a permit letter from the Child and Women Protection office. As a result, many people choose to marry first through religious ceremonies and only later apply for dispensation if necessary (Amirah & Eva, 2023). This marriage dispensation is not always accepted and is only granted under two main conditions: if the individual is pregnant, either due to rape or other reasons, or if they are pregnant after an unregistered marriage. According to the Supreme Court Regulation No. 5 of 2019, the conditions for applying for a marriage dispensation generally refer to these situations (Makka et al., 2020; Yetta et al., 2024).

In addition, another perspective on the prevalence of child marriage in Luwu Regency suggests that early marriage must be ended due to the significant risks it poses, especially to women. The main factors contributing to child marriage in Luwu Regency are threefold. First is poverty, where girls from low-income households are almost three times more likely to marry before the age of 18 compared to those from wealthier families. Second is rural culture, where girls in rural areas are almost twice as likely to marry before 18 compared to girls in urban areas. Finally, low education levels, where women aged 20-24 who married before 18 are nearly four times more likely to have not completed high school compared to those who married after 18. From these variables, it can be concluded that the prevalence of child marriage is a structural issue that requires an immediate solution from the government (Anam, 2024).

Child marriage based on the perspective of Islamic law is explained from the results of an interview obtained with one of the counselors at the Office of Religious Affairs in Larompong District. In this view, when referring to Islamic law, the age of marriage is not explicitly limited by age. Still, it is measured by a person's maturity or adulthood (*baligh*) to marry (Supriyanto et al., 2024), as exemplified by the marriage of the Prophet Muhammad. to Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) at a very young age, when Aisha was around 6 years old. The marriage of the Prophet Muhammad saw. To Aisha ra., it is considered permissible (*mubah*) but not recommended, let alone obligatory, in the context of marriage rules (Muljan et al., 2024).

In my view regarding Aisha's underage condition, it is essential to observe the example set by the Prophet Muhammad saw., who certainly did not have marital relations with her at such a young age. Therefore, from the perspective of positive law, marriage to an underage person is not encouraged because several considerations need to be taken into account, such as health concerns and the mental readiness of a person when marrying at a young age (Kamal, 2024). In conclusion, in Islamic law, marrying underage is permissible, but there are many deep considerations regarding its permissibility (Ardiansyah, 2023).

The following discussion addresses child marriage from the perspective of local customs. It is stated that child marriage does not seem to be a problem in the community, but the basis for child marriage is that a girl can be married while still in the cradle. However, for men who marry girls still in the cradle, they are required to go away, or "*laoni sempe' laki-laki*" (go on a journey). Once the girl matures, the man who was previously away will return, and in Luwu, the custom is that marriage is considered when they have reached adulthood (*aqil baligh*). In Luwu's culture, people are often engaged from a young age, though the maturity of both parties is still considered. The reason for arranging marriages early is to preserve the purity of lineage. Furthermore, the *ambo mappabati* system (the father with the highest lineage) applies, where a man marries a woman of lower noble status, yet their children still inherit noble blood. Early marriage in this context is more about maintaining lineage, particularly in Luwu, and traditionally, there are requirements and considerations before a marriage is arranged. One such consideration is the *mappasiula'* process, which can take a long time, not just days, but sometimes months. This tradition includes several steps, and one purpose is to prepare families for the future, as the children may later be appointed as community leaders such as *arung*, *tomakaka*, *pareng'nge'*, or *maddika* (Sulolipu, 2023).

The statement above indicates that child marriage in Luwu tends to be seen as a way to preserve family lineage. If the child has not yet reached adulthood, marriage is not recommended, but arrangements are made for the future when they reach adulthood (*aqil baligh*). From an Islamic law perspective, various factors influencing child marriage in Luwu have been revealed through interviews with religious affairs counselors. One interviewee, ND, explained that her marriage occurred through family matchmaking at 15, although she initially rejected the decision. After marriage, she faced economic difficulties and threats from her husband, which eventually led her to divorce after two years. Another interviewee, NB, married at 14 in 2021 after stopping her education. A village imam conducted her marriage, and she now has a one-year-old daughter as of October 2023.

SMS, another underage marriage participant, explained that her marriage occurred due to an unplanned pregnancy, forcing her to marry her partner despite financial difficulties. Interviews with several heads of Religious Affairs Offices (KUA) in South Larompong, Bua, and Belopa revealed various reasons behind this phenomenon, including free association, family pressure, and concerns about family honor. In some cases, families feel forced to marry off their daughters to avoid more significant problems, such as out-of-wedlock pregnancies (Subeitani,



2022). Prevention efforts are also carried out by the P2TP2A of Luwu, which conducts socialization in schools and villages in collaboration with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to protect children's rights and prevent early marriage. Additionally, interviews with several parties also highlight the views of Islamic law and local customs regarding child marriage. Islamic law permits child marriage if the individual meets the requirements of *aqil baligh*, though there are many considerations, such as health and mental readiness. In Luwu culture, early marriage is sometimes seen as a way to preserve lineage and family traditions, but certain conditions must be met in the marriage process.

Legislation essentially sets boundaries for society's behavior toward individuals or groups. As a result of the revision of Law No. 1 of 1974 to Law No. 16 of 2019 regarding the marriage age limit (Article 7, Paragraph 1), one of the foundations for this change refers to Law No. 23 of 2002 on Child Protection in Chapter One (General Provisions), Article 1, which states, "A child is someone who has not yet reached 18 years of age, including those still in the womb." Furthermore, the 1945 Constitution, Article 27, Paragraph (1) states: "All citizens are equal before the law and the government and must respect the law and the government without exception." This article emphasizes equality before the law for all citizens (Rapitah, 2024; Putri et al., 2024).

Based on the researcher's analysis, the obstacles to enforcing the law on child marriage can be seen in the lack of public awareness, insufficient government supervision or education, and the leniency in its practice due to economic background, traditions, free association, and patriarchal views (Mudar et al., 2024; Aris & Bukido, 2022). To address these challenges in enforcing the law on child marriage, a more comprehensive approach is needed, referencing other laws. For instance, Law No. 16 of 2019 enforcement on the Marriage Age Limit and the Supreme Court Regulation No. 5 of 2019 on the Guidelines for Adjudicating Marriage Dispensation Applications are not enough on their own.

Additional legal frameworks that can help address child marriage issues are outlined in Law No. 12 of 2022 on Sexual Violence Crimes, particularly in Article 10, Paragraphs (1) and (2), which offer legal grounds for tackling child marriage problems in Luwu. Furthermore, to increase awareness about the prevalence of child marriage, the government could develop regulations or local laws that enforce the marriage age limit at the village or subdistrict level.

## **CONCLUSION**

Child marriage in Luwu Regency is influenced by factors such as weak community awareness, lack of government oversight, free association, traditional beliefs, and economic backgrounds. Patriarchal views also play a role. Data from the Integrated Service Center for Women and Children Empowerment (P2TP2A) show 236 cases seeking marriage dispensations, with 227 requests approved by the Belopa Religious Court. Legal frameworks such as Law No. 16 of 2019 and Supreme Court Regulation No. 5 of 2019 provide guidelines. Still, they are not fully

effective in raising public awareness about the impact of child marriage. Islamic law allows child marriage under certain conditions, but it is not encouraged, while traditional views often see it as a way to preserve lineage. Child marriage for cultural reasons can lead to criminal penalties of up to 9 years, as per Law No. 12 of 2022 on Sexual Violence Crimes.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

We want to express sincere gratitude to all stakeholders who assisted in completing this research. All the time, ideas, and knowledge provided were invaluable to the researcher.

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