



## **The Meaning of Marriage: A Phenomenological Study of Women Married at Early Age**

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**Abstract:** Adolescents' developmental tasks are including associating with peers, looking and building for self-identity, and exploring the environment. However, the number of marriage case in adolescence keeps increasing, resulting to the adolescents to face the developmental task that usually faced in early adulthood. This study explores the meaning of marriage for women who are married at 19 years of age. The study participants were three women married at 19 years old, had children, and lived in Makassar City with their partners. This research is qualitative research with a phenomenological approach. The research data were obtained using semi-structured interviews and processed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The results showed: a) Parental belief, economy, and self are the factors behind early marriage; b) Apart from cognitive aspects, emotional aspects also play a role in shaping the view of marriage; c) The changes that occur before and after marriage give rise to various types of emotions, especially changes in relationships with peers that give rise to negative emotions; d) A coping strategy that is not right makes problems that occur in married life are not

appropriately resolved; and e) The spiritual aspect plays a significant role in shaping marriage commitment.

**Keywords:** *Early Marriage, Adolescence, Meaning of Marriage*

## INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a transitional period in the human life span that connects childhood and adulthood. This period is marked by changes in physical, emotional, social, interests and behavior patterns.<sup>1</sup> Immature brain development can cause adolescent emotions to trump common sense, allowing teens to make less wise choices.<sup>2</sup>

There are development tasks that need to be done well. Adolescents who carry out developmental tasks well will have no difficulties in their social life and will bring happiness and success in completing developmental tasks for the next phase. Conversely, adolescents who fail to carry out their developmental tasks will face certain difficulties in social life in the next phase. This causes adolescents to be unhappy, raises community rejection, and difficulties in completing developmental tasks.<sup>3</sup> Developmental tasks during adolescence include developing interpersonal communication skills, getting along with peers, finding their own identity, etc.<sup>4</sup>

Adolescents are synonymous with expanding relationships, exploring their environment and themselves. It is not an ideal phase to develop intimacy and commitment to the opposite sex in the form of a marriage, which is a developmental task for the next phase in life, that is early

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<sup>1</sup> John W. Santrock, *Life-Span Development: Perkembangan Masa Hidup Jilid I*, 13th ed. (Jakarta: Erlangga, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> D.E Papalia, S.W Olds, and R.D Feldman, *Human Development: Perkembangan Manusia* (Jakarta: Salemba Humanika, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Khamim Zarkasih Saputro, "Memahami Ciri Dan Tugas Perkembangan Masa Remaja," *Aplikasia: Jurnal Aplikasi Ilmu-ilmu Agama* 17, no. 1 (2018): 25.

<sup>4</sup> John W. Santrock, *Life-Span Development: Perkembangan Masa Hidup Jilid I*, 13th ed. (Jakarta: Erlangga, 2012).

adulthood. From the results of a survey conducted by UNICEF in 2019, it was found that 21 percent of women were married before the age of 18. As many as 650 million women alive today are married under the age of 18. Furthermore, by 2030 the number of early marriages is predicted to increase by 130 million women.<sup>5</sup> Early marriages occur when individuals reach their childhood or adolescence, where adolescence moves from 13 to 18 years of age.<sup>6</sup> Amendments to the law written in Law no. 16 of 2019 concerning marriage have raised the minimum age limit for women who will carry out marriages from 16 to 19 years old. Thus, it is classified as an early marriage when marriage occurs before the individual turns 19 years old.

In Indonesia, the rate of early marriage increased from 2017 to 2018. In 2017, the percentage of early marriage was 14.18%, and in 2018 it increased to 15.66%.<sup>7</sup> Sarwono revealed that many marriages occur during adolescence because adolescents are very vulnerable to sexual behavior.<sup>8</sup> Early marriages also often occur because teenagers think emotionally about marriage; they think they have loved each other and decided to be ready to get married without thinking about domestic problems in the future.<sup>9</sup> Research conducted by Mahfudin & Waqi'ah<sup>10</sup> and Mubasyaroh<sup>11</sup> found that

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<sup>5</sup> UNICEF, "Children Marriage Around the World," <https://www.unicef.org/stories/child-marriage-around-world>.

<sup>6</sup> Mubasyaroh, "Analisis Faktor Penyebab Pernikahan Dini Dan Dampaknya Bagi Pelakunya," *Jurnal Pemikiran dan Penelitian Sosial Keagamaan* 7, no. 2 (2016): 385–411.

<sup>7</sup> SindoNews, "Angka Pernikahan Dini Jumlahnya Meningkat," last modified 2019, <https://nasional.sindonews.com/read/1396184/15/angka-pernikahan-dini-jumlahnya-meningkat-1555377616>.

<sup>8</sup> Fajar Tri Utami, "Penyesuaian Diri Remaja Putri Yang Menikah Muda," *Psikis: Jurnal Psikologi Islami* 1, no. 1 (2016): 11–21.

<sup>9</sup> Agus Mahfudin; Khoirotul Waqi'ah, "Pernikahan Dini Dan Pengaruhnya Terhadap Keluarga Di Kabupaten Sumenep Jawa Timur," *Hukum Keluarga Islam* 1, no. 1 April (2016): 33–49.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

economic factors, parents, education, premarital pregnancy, and culture often became the reasons for self-marriage to occur.

Research conducted by Field et al. shows that there are several impacts of early marriage, some of which are dropping out of school, subordination in the family, risk of domestic violence, lack of control over reproductive health, high chances of maternal death, marital instability, low health status, too many children, the unequal status of women, and child welfare. Early marriage has social, economic, and health impacts in both the short and long term.<sup>12</sup> The number of negative impacts of early marriage is inversely proportional to the fact that early marriage is increasing every year.

The meaning of marriage is the key to the dynamics that occur in married life. The meaning of marriage involves a cognitive process towards marriage, wherein the information process or how individuals think about marriage and have specific marriage experiences.<sup>13</sup> Timmer & Orbach explained that the meaning of marriage is part of a cognitive structure that makes individuals understand and evaluate the marriage relationship. Two factors influence marriage's meaning, namely the meaning of the couple and the interpretation of marriage. Individuals construct meaning about events, objects, and about a person in their social environment through interaction. When a couple gets married, the individual interpreting the meaning of marriage is more determined by the overall social experience, language, and general culture of beliefs about marriage than by interactions with the

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<sup>11</sup> Mubasyaroh, "Analisis Faktor Penyebab Pernikahan Dini Dan Dampaknya Bagi Pelakunya," *Jurnal Pemikiran dan Penelitian Sosial Keagamaan* 7, no. 2 (2016): 385–411.

<sup>12</sup> Erica Field, "Consequences of Early Marriage for Women in Bangladesh †," no. September (2004). <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Consequences-of-Early-Marriage-for-Women-in-Field/01ba9e638d099e4b84796f6cedd3d996b800e635#citing-papers>

<sup>13</sup> Scott S. Hall, "Marital Meaning: Exploring Young Adults' Belief Systems about Marriage," *Journal of Family Issues* 27, no. 10 (2006): 1437–1458.

spouse.<sup>14</sup> In his paper, Ozygit revealed three phases of marriage, namely the pre-marriage phase, which refers to the decision to marry and the choice of a partner; the marriage phase refers to the dynamics of marriage and the marriage principles; and the post-marriage phase, where this phase focuses more on individuals who experience divorce.<sup>15</sup>

Many studies related to early marriage, such as research conducted by Hastuty,<sup>16</sup> Djamilah<sup>17</sup>, and Mahfudin & Waqi'ah<sup>18</sup>, examines the factors of early marriage and the impact caused by early marriage. However, no study has been found examining individual subjective thoughts or feelings regarding their marriage experiences that shape their meaning of marriage. This marriage's meaning refers to the two phases of marriage, namely the pre-marriage phase and the marriage phase. Therefore, this study explores the meaning of marriage for women who marry at an early age about their marriage experiences.

## METHOD

This research is qualitative research with a phenomenological approach. This approach is used to explore individual meanings of things that happen to the participants. Participants in the study amounted to 3

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<sup>14</sup> Susan G. Timmer and Terri L. Orbuch, "The Links between Premarital Parenthood, Meanings of Marriage, and Marital Outcomes," *Family Relations* 50, no. 2 (2001): 178–185.

<sup>15</sup> Melike Koçyiğit Özyiğit, "The Meaning of Marriage According to University Students: A Phenomenological Study," *Kuram ve Uygulamada Eğitim Bilimleri* 17, no. 2 (2017): 679–711.

<sup>16</sup> Yulina Dwi Hastuty, "Faktor-Faktor Yang Berhubungan Dengan Terjadinya Pernikahan Dini Di Desa Sunggal Kanan Kabupaten Deliserdang," *AVERROUS: Jurnal Kedokteran dan Kesehatan Malikussaleh* 2, no. 2 (2018): 55.

<sup>17</sup> Reni Kartikawati Djamilah, "Dampak Perkawinan Anak Di Indonesia," *Jurnal Studi Pemuda* 3, no. 1 (2015): 1–16.

<sup>18</sup> Agus Mahfudin; Khoirotul Waqi'ah, "Pernikahan Dini Dan Pengaruhnya Terhadap Keluarga Di Kabupaten Sumenep Jawa Timur." *Hukum Keluarga Islam* 1, no. April (2016): 33–49.

(three) people with the criteria of married women at the age  $\geq 19$  years, have children and live in Makassar City together with their husbands. Researchers used semi-structured interviews which were compiled based on Smith's theory of meaning that could be answered from the thoughts or feelings of the participants related to their experiences<sup>19</sup>, as well as Hall<sup>20</sup> and Ozyigit<sup>21</sup> about the meaning of marriage which is divided into two-time dimensions, namely the pre- marriage phase (related to the decision to marry and the choice of a partner) and the marriage phase (related to the dynamics of marriage and the principles of marriage).

The data analysis technique used is the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The IPA approach is a double hermeneutic, which has two stages. The first stage is that the participants interpret their life experiences, and the second stage is that the researcher interprets the participants' experiences.<sup>22</sup> The data's validity used the researcher triangulation method, where this model used several different researchers or evaluators.<sup>23</sup>

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study produces several findings related to marriage's meaning for women who are married at the age  $\geq 19$  years. This study's results begin with

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<sup>19</sup> J.A Smith, *Dasar-Dasar Psikologi Kualitatif - Pedoman Praktis Metode Penelitian* (Bandung: Nusamedia, 2009).

<sup>20</sup> Scott S. Hall, "Marital Meaning: Exploring Young Adults' Belief Systems about Marriage," *Journal of Family Issues* 27, no. 10 (2006): 1437–1458.

<sup>21</sup> Melike Kocuyigit Özyigit, "The Meaning of Marriage According to University Students: A Phenomenological Study," *Kuram ve Uygulamada Eğitim Bilimleri* 17, no. 2 (2017): 679–711.

<sup>22</sup> J.A Smith, *Dasar-Dasar Psikologi Kualitatif - Pedoman Praktis Metode Penelitian* (Bandung: Nusamedia, 2009).

<sup>23</sup> Elizabeth Kristi Poerwandari, *Pendekatan Kualitatif Untuk Penelitian Perilaku Manusia* (Depok: LPSP3, 2011).

presenting a brief identity of the participants, followed by the results and discussion of the themes that arise in the data analysis.

**Table 1. Participants Identity**

		Participants		
		F (19)	N (18)	E (21)
Age at marriage	Participants	17 y.o	16 y.o	17 y.o
	Husbands	19 y.o	18 y.o	20 y.o
Last Education		Elementary School	Middle School	High School
Profession	Participant	Housewife	Housewife	Housewife
	Husbands	Laborer	Laborer	Laborer

The three participants, namely F, who is now 19 years old, N aged 18 years, and E aged 21 years respectively, married at the age of 19 years old to a man who was also classified as young. Each participant currently has a child. The three of them are housewives, while their husbands work as laborers. The participants' last education varied.

***The Decision to Get Married***

The things that underlie the participants in deciding to marry at an early age are different, even though they are married to their boyfriends. Participant E revealed that apart from feelings of mutual love with a partner, economic factors are the reason behind their marriage. E desires to continue studying after graduating from high school, but the family finances are not sufficient to pay E to make his wish come true. At the same time, E decided to get married after being proposed by her partner. This is in line with what Djamilah found that one of the factors behind early marriage is economic.

Generally, economic factors occur because they do not have the cost to continue their education.<sup>24</sup>

A unique thing comes from N's explanation that apart from love for each other, the family's specific belief is not to reject someone's proposal, making N finally marry at an early age. The belief factor from this family is a factor so that N gets married at an early age. . This is a different aspect of the marriage readiness theory proposed by Kashirskaya.<sup>25</sup> The components that play an essential role in forming individual marriage readiness are value orientation, marriage motivation, the idea of marriage hierarchy, marriage attitudes and expectations, and the idea of a marriage relationship.<sup>26</sup>

Unlike the other participants, the marriage in participant F was caused by feelings of mutual love with their partner. Mahfudin & Wa'qiah call this a self-factor; this mutual love gives rise to the desire to have a partner regardless of age and to think about household problems for the future.<sup>27</sup> The decision to marry at an early age because of feelings of mutual love shows that adolescents' decisions tend to be based on emotions.<sup>28</sup> The existence of a period of 'strum and drang' makes adolescents full of emotional turmoil to influence them to make decisions.<sup>29</sup> This is reinforced by the rejection of F's parents towards F's relationship with their partner so

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<sup>24</sup> Reni Kartikawati Djamilah, "Dampak Perkawinan Anak Di Indonesia." *Jurnal Studi Pemuda* 3, no. 1 (2015): 1–16.

<sup>25</sup> Irina Konstantinovna Kashirskaya, Svetlana Vasilievna Zholudeva, and Natalia Evgenievna Skrynnik, "Psychological Readiness for Marriage as Personal Formation," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 6, no. 6 (2015): 452–463.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Agus Mahfudin; Khoirotul Waqi'ah, "Pernikahan Dini Dan Pengaruhnya Terhadap Keluarga Di Kabupaten Sumenep Jawa Timur," *Hukum Keluarga Islam* 1, no. April (2016): 33–49.

<sup>28</sup> Fajar Tri Utami, "Penyesuaian Diri Remaja Putri Yang Menikah Muda," *Psikis: Jurnal Psikologi Islami* 1, no. 1 (2016): 11–21.

<sup>29</sup> B Hurlock, *Psikologi Perkembangan: Suatu Pendekatan Sepanjang Rentang Kehidupan* (Jakarta: Erlangga, 1990).



that the decision to marry at an early age that occurred to F was not based on her parents' decision. Refusal from his parents made F choose to elope (*kawin lari*) or in the Makassar tribe, which is the origin of F, is called *silariang*. *Silariang* is a marriage between a male and female pair after agreeing to run away together because the family disapproves of the relationship between the two partners, so they take a shortcut.<sup>30</sup> Although at this time, F and her partner had made peace with F's parents.

### *The Marriage View*

Participants have the same view of marriage during the pre-marriage phase and the marriage phase. Participants F and N revealed that their view regarding married life is taking care of the family in the pre-marriage phase. The view is still the same after the two participants are in the marriage phase. The difference between the two lies in the application process. In the pre-marriage phase, the view of marriage is only a cognition because they have not yet lived a married life, so that married life is less lived out. The knowledge they get from the people around them and their experiences as children in their core family are enough to let them know that marriage is related to taking care of a family. It is different when they have entered the marriage phase. In the marriage phase, their view of marriage is still related to taking care of the family. It is just that, apart from cognition, the emotional aspect also takes part in shaping their view of marriage. The negative emotions they feel during the marriage, such as sadness, disappointment, anger, stress, jealousy, and fatigue, form their view that taking care of a family is not easy. They did not expect that they would have

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<sup>30</sup> Israpil, "Silariang Dalam Perspektif Budaya Siri' Pada Suku Makassar," *Jurnal Pusaka* (2015): 53–67, [http://ejournal.alqolam.ac.id/index.php/jurnal\\_pusaka/article/view/23/29](http://ejournal.alqolam.ac.id/index.php/jurnal_pusaka/article/view/23/29).

difficulty taking care of the family. This also leads them to view that married life is not just about being happy.

Unlike the two previous participants, E's view of marriage in the phase before marriage and marriage is somewhat the same; married life has joys and sorrows. E's view of marriage is not just cognition but also emotion. Hearing experiences and witnessing others' married life shape E's view of a life of marriage full of joy and sorrow. In the phase before marriage, E is of the view that marriage is not just for one day but for eternity. Married life is inseparable from quarrels filled with various types of negative emotions. Although E had anticipated that married life would be filled with negative emotions, she admitted that living a married life was not easy for her to deal with. This made E regret getting married at an early age. Despite her regret, she could not help but continue with her married life.

#### *Change After Marriage*

Several changes occurred in the participants after marriage because of the demands of the role of a wife. As stated by the three participants, after marriage, they took care of themselves as they did before marriage and took care of their husbands and children. The changes that occurred made the participants realize the importance of being mature to support their married life. The immature nature of the participants makes the participants experience difficulties in their married life. This is because the age of the participants at the time of marriage is still in the adolescent stage where at that age, emotional tension is heightened, sadness and joy look over, seem explosive, and even difficult to control.<sup>31</sup> As a result, they will find it difficult to think clearly and tend to be dominated by their emotions..

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<sup>31</sup> John W. Santrock, *Life-Span Development: Perkembangan Masa Hidup Jilid I*, 13th ed. (Jakarta: Erlangga, 2012).

Another very striking change is activities with friends such as playing and traveling. This becomes a dilemma for the participants considering the participants' age in their teens, where the demands of the developmental task from adolescence are exploring and associating with peers.<sup>32</sup> The changes that occur sometimes bring out various kinds of feelings in the participants, some feel happy, sad, tired, and some even feel sorry for being married at an early age. The task of adolescence has not yet reached the intimacy relationship stage, which is a developmental task in early adulthood.<sup>33</sup>

### *Commitment to Marriage*

Commitment is a decision to stay and depend on a relationship. The marriage commitment is the extent to which an individual has the desire to maintain a better relationship.<sup>34</sup> In N's case, she could not be angry with the changes that happened to her after marriage because she decided to get married, and she already knew what might happen to married life. She tends to choose not to be angry with her partner because of the desire to maintain the relationship. She believes that if she is angry, it will likely affect her relationship with her partner.

There are five aspects of forming a marriage commitment: trust, honesty, loyalty, dependence, and mutual sharing.<sup>35</sup> In the case of E, there is a tendency that E depends on the status of her husband so that she maintains her domestic life. The meaning of dependence here is the feeling of being dependent emotionally, materially, financially, structurally, etc., on a partner that makes the individual stay in the circle of her marriage. When she

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid

<sup>33</sup> H Barbara, *Development*, 2nd ed. (Uniter Stated: Allyn N Balcon, 1990).

<sup>34</sup> John W. Santrock, *Life-Span Development: Perkembangan Masa Hidup Jilid I*, 13th ed. (Jakarta: Erlangga, 2012).

<sup>35</sup> John Defrain and Sylvia M. Asay, "Strong Families around the World: An Introduction to the Family Strengths Perspective," *Strong Families Around the World: Strengths-Based Research and Perspectives*, no. August (2014): 1–10.

and her husband fight, she has to fix it to maintain her domestic life. However, there is one aspect that E has that is not reflected in the theory of the aspect of the marriage commitment, namely the aspect of spirituality. E's belief in the meaning contained in Q.S. Al-Baqarah verse 286 that "*Allah will not give a trial beyond the limits of human ability*," illustrates that in E, there is a belief in God's power that makes hers maintain her marriage relationship.

#### *Efforts in Overcoming Problems in Marriage*

Many things can trigger problems in the participants' marital life, such as problems with the husband's work, children, limited opportunities to travel with friends, etc. Participant N admitted that quarrels with their partners usually occur when their partners are not working. The profession as a laborer does not guarantee that his partner will get a permanent job. On the other hand, participant E admitted that the triggers for the quarrels that occurred with his partner were various, such as E's jealousy towards his partner who was free to play and travel with his friends while E could not. Both F and N revealed that no particular efforts were made to calm the quarrel between her and her husband. They tend to stay quiet, then naturally get better. This is classified as unfavorable because no effort has been made to overcome it or prevent it from happening.

In contrast to the other two respondents, participant E chose to remain silent and instead left the house for a while so that her feelings of anger would not be ignited. She will return home when her feelings have calmed down, and her partner has calmed down. When they are calm, they will talk to each other and remind each other. The step taken by participant E is emotional focused coping, which is a form of coping strategy that is directed at reducing, reducing, limiting, or tolerating the emotions generated by stressors. Participant E uses a distancing dimension where the individual

tries to break free for a moment and takes a distance from the problem at hand.<sup>36</sup>

### *Insights from Married Life*

F, N, and E both have insights based on their marriage experience. Both F and E expressed that becoming an adult is the most crucial aspect of marriage, which is mutual understanding and should not be selfish. In contrast to the other two participants, N herself revealed that to live a married life without being burdened, before the marriage occurs, it is necessary to know the consequences and risks of married life. On the other hand, E revealed that it is better to avoid marriage in adolescence because, in adolescence, she must explore and interact with many people. The marriage that occurs in adolescence makes adolescents unable to carry out their developmental duties. This is what makes participants feel sorry for being married at an early age. The insights obtained from the three participants are based on the reflective thinking process, where reflective thinking is a meaning-making process that inspires individuals to understand more deeply an experience and its relation to other experiences. This process involves the whole self from the individual to arrive at a deep meaning.<sup>37</sup>

## **CONCLUSION**

The factors behind early marriage are economic factors, trust, and self. The view of marriage in the pre-marriage phase and the marriage phase are classified as the same; the difference is that in the marriage phase, the emotional aspects also participate in shaping the view of marriage. Changes in activities before marriage and after marriage make women sometimes feel

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<sup>36</sup> R.S Lazarus and S Folkman, *Stress, Appraisal, and Coping* (USA: Springer Publishing Company, Inc, 1984).

<sup>37</sup> Carol Rodgers, "Defining Reflection: Another Look at John Dewey and Reflective Thinking," *Teachers College Record* 104, no. 4 (2002): 842–866.

tired because now they are taking care of themselves and their families. Limited time to play with friends and travel makes women sometimes feel negative emotions that trigger feelings of regret at being married at an early age. One of the duties of adolescents is to get along with peers.

The problems that occur in married life are due to the immature nature of both husband and wife. An inappropriate coping strategy makes the problem not resolved properly and tends to be forgotten. Causing the same problems to happen again in the next life. Despite the many turmoils that occur in the married life of these young married individuals, they commit to survive in married life today. Knowing the consequences and risks of marriage before marriage and belief in God (spiritual aspect) plays a significant role in shaping marriage commitment to individuals..

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