

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**SCRUTINIZING THE UNDERLYING
FACTORS AND ELUCIDATING THE
IMPACTS OF CHILD MARRIAGE ON
INDIVIDUAL, FAMILY AND SOCIETY**

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ABSTRACT

At the international level, UNICEF has taken proactive steps in anticipating the upward trend in child marriage cases. According to estimates from UNICEF, 15 million teenagers worldwide will be married before turning 18 years old. This figure has alarmed those who fight for children's rights; thus, UNICEF advises each country to monitor and identify the dynamic variables that lead to child marriage cases in their respective countries. As a result, Malaysia has taken efforts to report occurrences of child marriage. The data reveals that child marriage in Malaysia likewise exhibits an upward trend, with Kelantan recording the greatest number of cases for Muslims and Sarawak recording the highest number of cases for non-Muslims. This study aims; i) to explore the underlying factors contributing to child marriage in Malaysia; ii) to elucidate the impacts of child marriage on the individual, family, and society; iii) to scrutinize the roles and responsibilities of the agencies in dealing with child marriage in Malaysia; and iv) to identify the issues and challenges faced by the agencies in dealing with child marriage. The study approach was designed by adapting qualitative methodologies with in-depth approach using semi-structured interviews to interview 19 informants married underage and 6 key informants (1 Syariah Judge JKSM, 1 Assistant Registrar JKSM, 1 Registration Officer JPN, 1 Family Counsellor LPPKN, and 2 Psychology Expert). In this study the Theory of Social Norm (to understand community culture in Kelantan and Sarawak) and Theory of Maturity (to understand the appropriate age for marriage) are both employed extensively to explain the phenomena of child marriage. As per results, findings show that premarital sex and unwed pregnancies were the primary causes informants applied for marriage. This happens because of both internal and external factors. The internal factors that ultimately result in the primary causes include poverty, dropping out of school, family issues, and involvement in social problems. Community culture and religion are external forces that pressure informants to get married. Additionally, this study confirmed child marriage exposes children to dangerous and harmful practices, eventually affecting the development of the children. The effects on children's physical health, mental health, economic situation, education, and level of responsibility are all being observed. To address this issue, there is no one magic bullet to solve the problems, however, this study believes sexual education is seen as a proactive step that should be taken to curb premarital sex and unwed pregnancies. Attempts to end this practice also may be made by providing financial aid, strengthening parental role, monitoring child's schooling, and publicizing the adverse effects of this practice. This study contributes to understanding the of current practices of child marriage in Malaysia context.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

Child marriage is an issue that is often accepted as a norm in many countries until the 20th century. However, this practice has been a controversial issue as it violates the rights of children. The unfavourable effects of child marriage are discussed far and wide especially with the advancement of development across the world. The role of a woman is discussed thoroughly especially with equal education opportunity. The improvement in the quality of living and economic condition has led to the debate on the practices of child marriage (United Nations Population Funds, 2012). The impact of child marriage is discussed from the perspective of a young girl and is widely acknowledged and associated with specific region such as Africa, the Middle East and the Indian sub-continent. However, child marriage is also common in Southeast Asian countries including Malaysia, Indonesia and Philippines, whereby this phenomenon has not been scrutinizing by the authorities (United Nations Children's Fund, 2018).

In understanding the phenomenon of child marriage, many researchers indicated that this practice contributes to negative consequences on the child. Among issues raised from child marriage, the child is married to an older man, to the child is subjected to marital abuse. For example, 47% of the child bride in Bangladesh experiences violence from the older spouse. It is noted that, the child has a less capacity to defend and protect herself as well as feel afraid to seek for help due to their tender age (Iyanoulu, 2008). Furthermore, child marriage practice also contributes to the negative impact on the child's health. For example, pregnancy interrupts the physical growth of the child and increases the risk of complication during pregnancy or childbirth (World Health Organization, 2011). At the same time, infant mortality is found to be 50% more likely to happen to the mother who is under the age of 20 years old. The infant is also exposed to the risk of premature birth and lack of nutrition (Raj, 2010). Besides, child marriage usually limits the education attainment of children, whereby 78% of children are found to discontinue schooling after marriage (Wodon et al., 2017). Lastly,