

AN INSIGHT ON PARENTS AND YOUTH PERCEPTION ON ASPECTS CONTRIBUTING TO CHILD MARRIAGE IN SABAH

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1. INTRODUCTION

Child marriage is a very common issue being discussed in many countries around the earth for so long and has become a vital topic till now. Convention on the right of the child (CRC) and Child Act 2001 defined "child" as any person under the age of 18. Both laws recognise on importance of the human rights of children. They must be protected from any violence, injury, abuse, neglect, mistreatment, and exploitation. Child marriage is referred to any individual who gets into a marriage life when at least one or both partners are below eighteen years old. This kind of marriage has always been associated with forced marriage and social crime since children are not allowed to give full consent and the marriage exposed them to various social issues such as domestic violence and unwanted pregnancy (United Nations Human Rights, n.d). In March 2021 it was reported by UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore that the COVID-19 pandemic is expected to put more than 10 million girls at risk of child marriage due to educational institutions are closed, limited social interaction, and the rise of poverty. This problem caught the attention of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and a global serious attempt called to end this human rights violation by 2030. In the context of Malaysia's rate of child marriage, as of October 2010 15, 000 cases were recorded involving teenage girls age below 15 years old (Noor Aziah Mohd Awal & Mohd Al Adib Samuri, 2018). Malaysia has formulated a law called The Law Reform (Marriage & Divorce) Act 1976 which sets the minimum age for marriage at 18 for non-Muslim marriages whereas Islamic Family Laws set the minimum age at 16 for Muslim marriages (Adilah, 2018). Even though there are laws restricted to child marriage, yet Sabah place the third highest child marriage in Malaysia for the year 2013 till 2018 (Mail, 2020). While the total of approved child marriages approved by Jabatan Hal Ehwal Agama Islam Negeri Sabah (JHEINS, 2021) for the year 2015 until the year 2020 was 3779. Out of 3779 cases, the top three causes were Kota Kinabalu with 790 cases (21%), followed by Tawau with 552 cases (14.6%), and Sandakan with 394 cases (10.4%). The balance of 2043 cases were distributed across Sabah districts such as Lahad Datu, Putatan, Papar, and more.

A review of past literature highlighted that poverty, traditional milestones, religious belief, parents' conscience, and gender inequality were factors contributing to child marriage. Sabah was categorized as the poorest state in Malaysia which increased the probability of perceiving child marriage as the only solution to shift the burden of finances to the husband (Geraldine, 2020). The culture within certain societies still possesses a strong belief to practice traditional marriage customs, outdated customs, culture, and bind by taboos and particularly in remote areas (Pugh-Kitingan, n.d.). Besides that, most parents justified their decision to marry their daughter based on religious beliefs (Teeranee Techasrivichien, 2020). In terms of parents' conscience, some parents already arranged the marriage for their daughters, in some cases

during infancy, where it is considered as a form of marital union (Vandana et al., 2017) and they have the full power in determining the marriage of their daughters under the age of majority. Talking about child marriage, gender disparities become one of the factors contributing to child marriage where women were considered as second-class citizens, denied human rights, and consistently devalued based on their sex (Girls Not Bride, 2020). Women in Sabah not only deal with disparities and injustices that impact both men and women, but they must also carry the burden of further discrimination based only on gender (Sabah Women's Action-Resource Group, n.d). In summary, poverty, traditional milestones, religious belief, parents' conscience, and gender inequality have a significant relationship with child marriage. Those are the aspects that encourage child marriage in the community. Considering parents is the one who gives concern to child marriage and youth is the younger generation who should be aware on this issue, hence the purpose of this study is to identify the relationship between factors contributing to child marriage and child marriage and to determine the differences between the perception of youth and parents on factors contributing to child marriage.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study was quantitative research and a cross-sectional survey. Scope of study covered the state of Sabah and unit of analysis was a youth at the age of 15 to 25 and parents within the age of 20 years above. The purposes of the study were comparison analysis between youth and parents in Sabah on their perception and correlation analysis between independent variables and dependant variables in which the former used Man Whitney test whereas the latter used Spearman Rho test as the data analysis techniques. Roscoe technique was used to determine the sample size since the population of youth and parents was unknown, where sample size which larger than 30 and smaller than 500 are acceptable for most studies. Hence, the researchers had decided to select 130 samples of both youth and parents respectively with a total of 260 sample sizes. Data was collected from 1st of June 2021 to 20th of June 2021 through an online platform i.e., Google Forms. Finally, a convenience sampling technique was chosen particularly in which the people who participated in the survey were the ones who were volunteered and agreed to participate.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Relationship Between Factors Contributing to Early Marriage and child Marriage from The Perception of Youth and Parents

The study was using 5 Likert scale where 1 represents strongly disagree and 5 represent strongly agree and 260 predetermined samples size were achieved. Spearman Rho correlation analysis was conducted to answer the research objective. The result showed there was weak positive relationship between poverty, traditional milestone, religious belief, and child marriage ($r=0.229, p=0.00, r=0.249, p=0.00, r=0.197, p=0.00$). Next, low positive relationship also exists between parents' conscience and child marriage ($r= 0.311, p= 0.00$). Finally, moderate positive relationship exists between gender inequality and child marriage ($r= 0.682, p= 0.00$). Therefore, all alternate hypotheses were accepted, and null hypotheses were rejected. Table 1 below is the details of the correlation matrix table.

Table 1: Correlation Matrix of Early Marriage with Other Variables

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Child Marriage | <u>1</u> | | | | | |
| Poverty | .229 | <u>2</u> | | | | |
| Traditional Milestones | .249 | .376 | <u>3</u> | | | |
| Gender inequality | .682 | .230 | .209 | <u>4</u> | | |
| Parents' Conscience | .311 | .498 | .329 | .264 | <u>5</u> | |
| Religious Belief | .197 | .303 | .527 | .182 | .341 | <u>6</u> |
| N = 260 | | | | | | |

3.2 Differences between the Perception of Youth and Parents on Factor Contributing to Early Marriage

Table 2: Comparison in Perception Between Youth and Parents in Early Marriage

| | Group of Respondents | N | Mean Rank | U | Z | Sig. |
|-----------------------|----------------------|-----|-----------|--------|--------|------|
| Poverty | Parents | 130 | 154.91 | 5276.5 | -5.248 | .000 |
| | Youth | 130 | 106.09 | | | |
| Traditional Milestone | Parents | 130 | 146.78 | 6334.0 | -3.504 | .000 |
| | Youth | 130 | 114.22 | | | |
| Gender inequality | Parents | 130 | 136.82 | 7629.0 | -1.360 | .174 |
| | Youth | 130 | 124.18 | | | |
| Parents' Conscience | Parents | 130 | 158.03 | 4870.5 | -5.919 | .000 |
| | Youth | 130 | 102.97 | | | |
| Religious Belief | Parents | 130 | 146.22 | 6306.0 | -3.385 | .001 |
| | Youth | 130 | 114.78 | | | |

Man Whitney U test was conducted to evaluate whether there was a difference of perception between youth and parents. The above result has shown that both respondents perceived the factors with significant difference except for gender inequality no significant difference was observed with small effect calculated. The test revealed that the other significant values were less than 0.05 which makes the null hypothesis rejected. In Table 2, the significant value for poverty is 0.00, the traditional milestone is 0.00, parents' conscience 0.00, and religious belief with 0.01 whereas gender inequality is calculated as 0.174 which is higher than 0.05 of significant value that indicated the null hypothesis accepted.

4. CONCLUSION

The study revealed the existence of a relationship between factors contributing to child marriage and child marriage. In contrast, there is no significant difference between youth and parents on the factors that lead to child marriage. It's indicated that both respondents are clear on reasons for child marriage Their understanding is expected to create awareness on the importance to taken care of child human rights for education, health, and voice to speak out their opinion. Due to gender disparity was the highest perceived factor and the existence of loophole in Sabah's laws and regulations, the government and policymakers should review the laws and regulations to tackle the issue of child marriage in Sabah. A respective government agency may conduct more seminars to parents and youth in creating awareness on reducing

cases of child marriage in Sabah. The nongovernmental organisation also advisable to play more concerted effort to curb the child marriage issue in Sabah by organising a seminar or educate the community on the negative impact of child marriage. The same goes to the head of the village need to conduct any program to educate parents on the rights of children for education, healthy life, social life, family life and enjoying their childhood. Children are our future, the effort to provide an opportunity to grow and excel in many aspects needs to be the main agenda of government and community. Initially, the study planned to include women experience early marriage, however, since the data received from JAHEINS was not completed and we were informed by the officer on the confidentiality of the data, also due to pandemic covid-19 the university did not encourage researchers to collect data physically, we have to switch the respondents to parents and youth. Since this study only focuses on perception and not covering the individual who experiences child marriage, we recommend future researchers choose the one who undergoes child marriage as their respondents to obtain a more meaningful result. A combination of mixed-method research also can be considered in the future to get more in-depth information and findings related to the topic.

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