

Child Marriage Prevention Policy a Study on the Role of Local Governments and Non-Governmental Organizations

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify and analyze policy interventions for child marriage prevention, focusing on the roles of local governments and non-governmental organizations. Using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach with the PRISMA protocol and the ADO (Antecedent-Decision Out-come framework, this study analyzes seven articles from Google Scholar published in 2025. The results indicate that the success of child marriage prevention depends on policy synergy, the strengthening of local actors' roles, and cross-sectoral collaboration. Effective interventions combine regulatory, educational, and cultural approaches. The study concludes that a combination of structural, cultural, and educational interventions, reinforced by synergy between local governments and non-governmental organizations, is key to addressing this issue holistically and sustainably.

INTRODUCTION

Even with various national policies in place, child marriage remains a serious threat to human development in Indonesia. UNICEF reported in 2017 that one in nine girls marries before the age of 18 (Annah, I., 2025). While Law Number 16 of 2019 raised the minimum legal age for women to marry to 19, informal marriages and dispensation practices still occur frequently (Amri, M. Z. A., Baedah, S. S. A., & Arsyad, Y. M., 2025). Social and cultural factors like poverty, social pressure, and gender norms continue to fuel child marriage, especially in areas with significant developmental challenges (Subhan, A., 2025).

Problem Statement

The main issue this study addresses is the persistently high rate of child marriage in Indonesia despite regulatory changes. Policy implementation is often hindered by deep-seated socio-cultural factors and weak coordination among different stakeholders, including a lack of synergy between local governments and non-governmental organizations.

Research Aim and Novelty

This study aims to conduct a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to identify, classify, and critically analyze various policy interventions for child marriage prevention, with a primary focus on the roles of local governments and non-governmental organizations. The study uses the ADO (Antecedent-Decision-Outcome) approach. The novelty of this research lies in its application of an SLR approach based on the PRISMA protocol within the context of Indonesian law, which is still a rare practice. This approach will provide a comprehensive, evidence-based picture, opening up opportunities for more integrated and effective policy recommendations.

Scope and Importance of the Study

The scope of this research covers literature from Google Scholar and other academic databases that have published studies on child marriage prevention policies in Indonesia. This includes an analysis of the effectiveness of interventions, cross-sectoral coordination, and implementation challenges at the local government and non-governmental organization levels. The emphasis on an SLR allows for the systematic inclusion of both empirical and analytical studies, making a tangible contribution to social law literature and evidence-based policy development.

This study is important because it provides a comprehensive, evidence-based overview through an SLR approach to map interventions and identify successes, gaps, and challenges. The findings are expected to serve as a basis for more targeted decision-making, enhance cross-sectoral synergy, and strengthen child protection efforts in Indonesia. Consequently, this study contributes to the development of more effective and sustainable legal policies for preventing child marriage.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Policy Implementation Theory (Top-Down/Bottom-Up)

This framework, developed by Sabatier & Mazmanian, assesses three aspects: the tractability of the problem, the ability of regulations to guide the process (clarity of goals, implementation tools, sanctions), and the influence of the external environment and implementing actors (Rahmawati, R., 2025). This helps to explain why national policies can have different outcomes in various regions, depending on the policy design and local context.

Street-Level Bureaucracy

This theory highlights the discretion of frontline implementers, such as KUA (Office of Religious Affairs) officials, counselors, social workers, health workers, and teachers. Their micro-decisions, often made under conditions of limited resources and case pressure, effectively "shape" the policy on the ground. Therefore, the quality of guidelines, training, and workload becomes a key variable.

Collaborative Governance

Since child marriage prevention is a cross-sectoral issue, collaborative governance is a crucial lens. It emphasizes that local governments, relevant agencies, village officials, religious institutions, and NGOs need to build face-to-face dialogue, trust, shared commitment, and a common understanding to reduce program fragmentation (Simbolon, M., 2025). The Ansell & Gash framework guides the prerequisites for collaboration and its process dynamics.

Social Norms Theory

Family decisions are influenced by social norms. According to Bicchieri, sustainable change occurs when both empirical expectations (what others do) and normative expectations (what is considered appropriate) also shift (Dewi, R. M., 2025). Therefore, interventions must aim to change collective expectations involving fathers, religious leaders, and peers—rather than just providing information. UNICEF documents affirm this normative approach in prevention programs.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) design to systematically identify, evaluate, and synthesize all relevant scientific evidence (Nabila, A. B., 2025) regarding child marriage prevention policy interventions, with a specific focus on the roles of local governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). This approach allows researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of policy implementation, the effectiveness of interventions, and the forms of cross-actor synergy within the context of child marriage prevention in Indonesia. The SLR also provides a foundation for identifying existing research gaps, which can support evidence-based policy making (Rother, 2007).

Literature Search Process

The literature search was conducted systematically using the Google Scholar academic database due to its broad coverage of indexed journals, proceedings, research reports, and policy documents. To ensure the data's relevance and recency, the search was limited to literature published in 2025. This specific time frame was chosen to capture the latest developments in child marriage prevention practices and policies, including strategic innovations and policy adaptations in response to regulatory changes and social dynamics.

The search keywords were formulated by combining main terms and relevant synonyms: "intervensi kebijakan" OR "kebijakan pencegahan" AND "pernikahan anak" AND ("pemerintah daerah" OR "local government") AND ("LSM" OR "lembaga non-pemerintah" OR "NGO") AND ("sinergi" OR "kolaborasi").

Data Selection and Analysis

A total of 715 articles were found from the initial search on Google Scholar in 2025. The screening process was conducted in two stages:

1. First-stage screening: Articles were selected based on their titles and abstracts to ensure direct relevance to the topic of child marriage prevention policy interventions and a focus on the role of local governments or NGOs.
2. Second-stage screening: Inclusion criteria were applied, which included:
 - a. the study discusses child marriage prevention,
 - b. it involves local government or NGO actors,
 - c. it is based on the Indonesian context, and
 - d. it is structured using a scientifically valid research method.

Exclusion criteria were used to filter out duplicate articles, irrelevant studies, opinions or commentaries without empirical data, and publications that did not meet academic quality standards. After the first and second stages of screening, only 7 articles met the inclusion criteria and were ready for further analysis.

Analysis Process

The selected articles were analyzed using a thematic analysis technique, which involved grouping the data into key themes:

1. Forms of child marriage prevention policy interventions.
2. Specific roles of local governments.
3. Contributions of ngos in policy implementation.
4. Patterns of cross-sectoral synergy.
5. Barriers to implementation.
6. Best practices that can be replicated.

The thematic analysis was performed through a thorough reading, tagging of important concepts, and synthesis of the findings to produce a comprehensive overview that integrates all the evidence obtained. This process ensures that the research results not only describe the existing conditions but also provide a constructive critique of the effectiveness of the interventions.

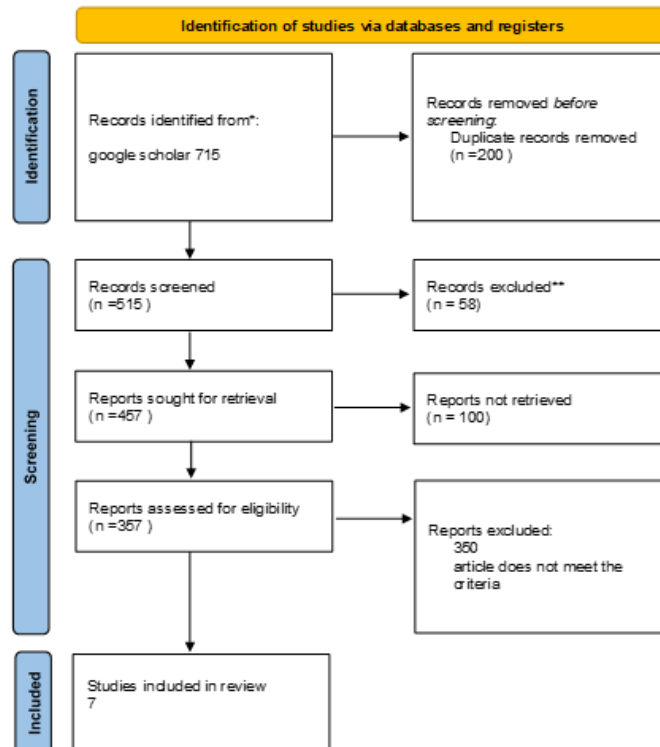


Figure 1. Desain Systematic Literature Review (SLR)
Source Processed by Researchers 2025

RESEARCH RESULT

Based on the 2025 literature search from Google Scholar, a total of 715 relevant articles were found related to child marriage prevention policy interventions. After a strict screening process using inclusion and exclusion criteria, only 7 articles were suitable for in-depth analysis.

Key Findings from the Literature

1. Rosnah & Kasim (2025) examined the implementation of Regional Regulation No. 8 of 2021 in South Konawe Regency. They found that marriage under the age of 18 impacts women's health, including risks of anemia, pregnancy complications, and limitations in parenting. Children born from early marriages were also found to be vulnerable to stunting and developmental delays. Key barriers to policy implementation included a lack of socialization, minimal reproductive health education, the dominance of religious-customary norms, and weak coordination between agencies.
2. Tanaka (2025) discussed the strategies of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in areas prone to child marriage, specifically Southeast Sulawesi. The study highlighted that conservative views, weak progressive interventions, and legal loopholes for marriage dispensation exacerbate the practice of child marriage. The author recommended that the Ministry of Religious Affairs issue a Ministerial Regulation designating child marriage prevention as a Key Performance Indicator (KPI), along with strengthening the capacity of counselors and fostering multi-party collaboration.

3. Nataniya & Widowati (2025) reviewed the role of stakeholders in Rembang Regency. The local government implemented programs such as School-Age Youth Guidance (BRUS) and five-session counseling for couples seeking marriage dispensation. Collaboration with the Religious Court through a memorandum of understanding was effective in reducing the number of child marriages. However, challenges such as a lack of cross-sectoral synergy, low public awareness, and cultural and economic barriers still persist.
4. Arso (2025) focused on the protection of underage women from potential violence in customary marriages in Tobelo. The study found that weak legal protection allows for injustice and violence. The author proposed the harmonization of customary law and positive law, as well as the application of Restorative Justice as a conflict resolution approach.
5. Baihaqi, Muzakki, & Wagianto (2025) discussed the impact of marriage dispensations due to out-of-wedlock pregnancies on the rights of women and children. The findings emphasize the need for a balance between protecting children and the rights of women, in line with human rights principles and the values of justice in Islamic law.
6. Damayanti & Kamal (2025) explored the challenges faced by Generation Z in understanding marriage law in the digital era. This generation tends to understand law normatively without deep ethical reflection. The authors recommended integrated Islamic family law education with digital religious literacy and relevant pre-marital guidance.
7. Hermawan, Kurniawati, & Madyan (2025) evaluated the role of the BP4 (Marriage Consultative and Guidance Board) in the Singosari District Office of Religious Affairs (KUA). Programs like Pre-marriage Counseling, Pusaka Sakinah, and BRUS were found to significantly reduce the rate of early marriage from 47 cases in 2023 to 17 cases by mid-2025. This success indicates that culturally integrated, community-based interventions can be an effective model for child marriage prevention.

Synthesis of Findings

Overall, these seven studies demonstrate that the success of child marriage prevention highly depends on policy synergy, strengthening the role of local actors, cross-sectoral collaboration, and integrating legal, cultural, and educational approaches.

DISCUSSION

Based on the ADO (Antecedent-Decision-Outcome) analysis, preventing child marriage requires a combination of structural (strong regulations, institutional strengthening), cultural (shifting social norms), and educational (legal and reproductive health literacy) interventions. The role of local government is crucial in establishing local regulations and programs, while non-governmental organizations are key in implementing more flexible and culturally sensitive community-based approaches. The effectiveness of these interventions will be maximized if both parties work in synergy to close legal loopholes and holistically integrate legal, religious, and social perspectives.

Antecedents (Causes of Child Marriage)

This research's findings show that the causes of child marriage in Indonesia are complex and interconnected. Economic factors are one of the most dominant drivers. Poverty often forces families to marry off their daughters at a young age in the hope of reducing the household's economic burden. This condition is worsened by limited access to education, whether due to long distances to school, high education costs, or low awareness of the importance of long-term education (Rosnah & Kasim, 2025).

In addition to economic factors, patriarchal norms and conservative religious views reinforce this practice. Some communities still strongly believe that girls should marry young to preserve "family honor" or to fulfill certain social constructions (Tanaka, 2025). These norms are often reinforced by traditional and religious leaders, making it difficult to change perspectives. In this context, child marriage is not seen as a problem but as part of tradition and cultural identity (Arso, 2025). A lack of legal and reproductive health literacy is also a serious issue, especially among young people. Generation Z, for example, often understands marriage law normatively without considering ethical values and long-term consequences (Damayanti & Kamal, 2025). This lack of understanding leaves adolescents with limited skills to resist or criticize practices that harm them.

Regulatory loopholes, such as the ease of granting marriage dispensations, further exacerbate this issue. In some cases, marriage dispensation is even used as a shortcut to "legalize" child marriage due to out-of-wedlock pregnancies, without comprehensively considering the protection of children's and women's rights (Baihaqi et al., 2025). This practice indicates a weak implementation of policies that should be an instrument of prevention. From a theoretical perspective, these factors reinforce each other in a difficult-to-break cycle. Poverty and low education create vulnerability, which is then reinforced by socio-cultural norms and regulatory weaknesses. As a result, partial policy interventions that only focus on one aspect tend to be ineffective.

Decisions (Policies and Actions Taken)

The research findings show that efforts to prevent child marriage have involved various parties with diverse strategies. At the local government level, key policies are realized through formal regulations like Regional Regulations on the Prevention of Early Marriage. These policies are followed by educational programs such as School-Age Youth Guidance (BRUS) and pre-marital counseling, designed to provide an understanding of reproductive health, children's rights, and the negative impacts of early marriage (Nataniya & Widowati, 2025; Hermawan et al., 2025). The Ministry of Religious Affairs plays a strategic role by recommending policies that strengthen the capacity of religious counselors and make child marriage prevention a Key Performance Indicator (KPI). This step is expected to drive changes in public perception through a moderate religious approach based on *maqāṣid syarī'ah* (the objectives of Islamic law), so that religious narratives are not used to justify child marriage practices (Tanaka, 2025).

Community-based organizations like BP4 integrate educational approaches, counseling, and family resilience strengthening while considering the local cultural context. This strategy has proven effective, as evidenced by a significant decrease in early marriage rates in intervention areas. In addition to educational approaches, there are also legal initiatives that encourage the harmonization of customary and positive law. The concept of Restorative Justice has been proposed as a model for handling child marriage cases, prioritizing mediation, reconciliation, and the restoration of victims' rights (Arso, 2025).

Overall, the combination of formal policies, capacity building, community-based education, and legal reform shows that child marriage prevention requires a multi-level and multi-actor approach. Policy success will depend heavily on cross-sectoral synergy, program sustainability, and the ability to change the social norms that are at the root of the problem.

Outcomes (Impacts and Results)

The results of child marriage prevention policy implementation vary across regions. Some areas have successfully recorded a significant decrease, such as the Singosari KUA, which managed to reduce the number of cases from 47 in 2023 to just 17 in mid-2025. This decrease shows that a combination of educational programs like BRUS, pre-marital counseling, and family resilience strengthening can have a tangible impact when implemented consistently (Hermawan et al., 2025).

Success is also seen in areas that prioritize cross-sectoral collaboration, involving local governments, religious institutions, religious courts, and community organizations. This synergy facilitates program coordination, expands the reach of education, and provides social and legal pressure to prevent early marriage practices (Nataniya & Widowati, 2025). However, policy effectiveness is not uniform. In some regions, interventions tend to be formalistic merely fulfilling administrative obligations—without addressing the root cultural issues, patriarchal norms, and conservative religious views that justify early marriage (Rosnah & Kasim, 2025). This makes policies less effective, even when regulations are in place.

Other challenges that hinder optimal impact include low public awareness, economic barriers, and weak coordination among implementing agencies. These factors often slow down changes in community behavior and make policy outcomes inconsistent across different regions. Overall, these findings confirm that the success of child marriage prevention policies is highly influenced by the integration of structural, cultural, and educational approaches. Policies that are combined with changes in social norms and community empowerment have a greater chance of providing sustainable results compared to policies that only focus on formal regulatory aspects.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that preventing child marriage requires a multifaceted approach, combining three key strategies: clear legal regulations, cultural change, and education. Legal frameworks provide strong protection for children, while cultural shifts are necessary to challenge and change societal views that still accept child marriage as a normal practice. Education, especially regarding legal rights and reproductive health, is crucial for both children and parents to understand the risks involved.

Local governments play a vital role by creating context-specific policies and prevention programs, while non-governmental organizations (NGOs) contribute with community-based approaches that are more flexible and culturally sensitive. Prevention efforts will be more effective if these two parties collaborate, close regulatory gaps, and holistically integrate legal, religious, and social perspectives. This sustained cooperation is the key to reducing the child marriage rate in Indonesia.

a. For Policymakers

Government and stakeholders should strengthen regulations and public education programs in areas with high prevalence of this issue. A participatory and culturally based approach is essential to ensure the effective implementation of policies on the ground.

b. For Communities and Educational Institutions

Communities, especially traditional and religious leaders, need to be more active in providing guidance and moral support. Educational institutions can integrate awareness materials on this issue into their curriculum and school activities, enabling prevention to start at an early age.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

1. Strengthening Synergy Between Local Government and NGOs Future research could explore more effective models of collaboration between local governments and NGOs in child marriage prevention. The focus could be on communication strategies, role division, and data-based monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.
2. Analysis of the Effectiveness of Community-Based Intervention Programs It is recommended to conduct research on the effectiveness of community-based intervention programs that combine legal, educational, and family economic empowerment approaches. This research can assess the extent to which grassroots interventions can change cultural perceptions and community behavior towards child marriage.

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