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The Safety Test of Granular Bioinsecticide Mixture of Betel Leaves (<i>Piper betel</i>) and Srikaya Seeds (<i>Annona squamosa</i>) Extract to Non Targetted Organism <i>Dia Qori Yaswinda, Dwi Wahyuni and Erma Sulistyarningsih</i>	540
Dimension of Nurses Responsiveness in Improving Health Quality Service Based On SERVQUAL Concept <i>Mohammad Henri Wahyono, Ancah Caesarina and Sebastiana Viphindrartin</i>	546
Child Marriage's Representation of Maternal Output to Premature Delivery Incidence in RSUD dr. Doris Sylvanus Hospital Palangka Raya, Indonesia <i>Sigit Nurfiyanto, Qurnia Andayani and Nyoman Anita Damayanti</i>	551
Risk Index of Infarct Stroke based on Modifiable Risk Factors <i>Santi Martini, Kuntoro, M. Hasan Machfoed and Joewono Soeroso</i>	557
Bio-Psycho-Socio-Cultural Approach Training Towards Drug Abuse and HIV-AIDS Prevention Among Teenagers <i>Margaretha, Santi Martini and Yulis Setiya Dewi</i>	563
Care Culture of Pregnant Mothers <i>Agustina Abuk Seran, Stefanus Supriyanto and Alberth M. Bau Mali</i>	570
Best Practice of Patient-Centered Care Implementation at Universitas Airlangga Hospital Indonesia <i>Purwaningsih, Nasronudin, Nyoman Anita Damayanti and Imam Subadi</i>	578
Patient Safety Incident Reporting Analysis Based on Integrity and Commitment Team in Inpatient <i>Heru Suswhojo and Nyoman Anita Damayanti</i>	583
Four Forms of Social Support for 3-6 Years Old Child's Caregivers <i>Qurnia Andayani</i>	589
Occupational Exposure to Green Tobacco Sickness among Tobacco Farmers in Jember, East Java, Indonesia <i>Anita Dewi Prahastuti Sujoso and Tri Martiana</i>	596
Early Marriage and Cultural Stigma of Madurese Young Woman Based on Review of Socio-Ecological Factors <i>Tri Anjaswarni, Nursalam, Ah Yusuf, Sri Widati and Tutik Herawati</i>	603
Belief, Self-Efficacy and Other Predictors of Adherence to ART Among Women Living with HIV <i>Widia Shofa Ilmiah, Mochammad Bagus Qomaruddin, Selvi Ulva Aisah Nurhadi Putri and Nova Iswardani</i>	610
Five Pillars of "Pro-Sehat DT" For Strengthening The Community Empowerment <i>Qurnia Andayani and Sudarmadji</i>	617
Analysis of The Influence of Service Quality to Outpatient's Satisfaction at Pharmacy Installation of Kaliwates Hospital <i>Hindun Mardiyana, Isa Ma'rufi and Zarah Puspitaningtyas</i>	622
Family's Support, Coping Mechanism, Disability and Depression Among Elderly in Rural Area <i>I Wayan Suardana, Ah Yusuf and NLK Sulisnadewi</i>	627
Enforcing the Services of Prolanis Based on Strategic Management Approach in Wonopringgo, Pekalongan Regency <i>Yuniarti, Etika and Dewi Nugraheni R. M.</i>	634

Early Marriage and Cultural Stigma of Madurese Young Woman Based on Review of Socio-Ecological Factors

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Abstract: The degree of maternal and child health has not yet been optimal. One of the contributory factors influencing this condition was the culture of early marriage. Child marriage threatens girls' lives and health, and it limits their future lives. The purpose of this study was to analyze the background of early marriage and the cultural stigma in young Madurese women. This was a descriptive observational study. The population were young Madurese women aged from 12 to 20 years from Wonokoyo village of Malang, both married and single, and were purposively selected. It is a fact that the tradition of early marriage was still maintained by the ethnicity of the Madurese. Madurese culture labels teenage women who have not yet got married as 'spinsters'. There were four factors triggering tradition of early marriage, and these were the individual, peers, family, and society. The culture of feeling disgraced has the young women of Madurese getting married at an early age. Less understanding about marriage diminished their anxiety of the effects that early marriage will cause. The society has to be equipped with a good understanding about early marriage so that they will be able to participate actively in building a healthy society.

1 INTRODUCTION

The degree of health of a mother and child nowadays has not been optimal and equal in Indonesia. Studies showed that the death rate of mother and infant in Indonesia is still at a high level. The General Director of Nutrition, the Ministry of Health of Indonesia, informs that there are 5 provinces with a high number of deaths of mother and infant, and one of them is East Java. The Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS) provides data that the death rate of infants in East Java decreased significantly from 43 out of 1,000 births in 2002 to 28.2 out of 1,000 births in 2009. However, the death rate of infants in East Java is still considered as the highest among the other provinces. Based on the survey conducted by the Department of Public Health of East Java (2009), it is found that Probolinggo significantly contributes to the high death rate in East Java (67.89 out of 1,000 births), followed by

Sampang (62.59 out of 1,000 births) and Situbondo (62.42 out of 1,000 births). A survey conducted by the Department of Public Health of East Java indicated that most of the death cases of the mothers are because of bleeding (45% of all death cases). In addition, another factor causing the death of the mother is the young age of mother (Dinas Kesehatan Provinsi Jawa Timur, 2009). The death rate of mothers at a young age is closely related to early marriage.

According to the Law of the Republic of Indonesia about marriage, an early marriage is the marriage of a child before they are 16 years old (female) and 19 years old (male) (Sekretariat-Negara-RI, 1974). According to UNICEF, a child is a person under the age of 18 years. This means that the early marriage of a child is if the marriage is when he/she is less than 18 years old (Marshan et al., 2013). Early marriage has happened often around the world, especially in developing countries

(Singh & Samara, 1996). One in every four girls is married before 18 years old. One in nine is married under 15 years old. According to the data from a survey of the Indonesian population, one-third of the marriages in 2007 involved a 16-year-old couple. The total amount of early marriage cases in Indonesia has reached 50 million people with the average age of marriage being 19.1 years old. The highest case of early marriage occurs in East Java (39.4%), followed by West Java (36%), South Kalimantan (35.5%), and then Jambi (30.6%).

Child marriage is a truly global problem. Early marriage is a common phenomenon in developing countries and is a long-established custom. Indonesia is one of the developing countries after Bangladesh and India who are still implementing early marriage (Singh & Samara, 1996) and (Sandhu & Geethalakshmi, 2017). Early marriage contravenes human rights and children's rights. It is one of the worst forms of discrimination and violence against young women (Yüksel-Kaptanoğlu & Ergöçmen, 2014) and (Unicef, 2005). Madura is one of the districts in East Java, which preserves the tradition of early marriage. Madurese culture labels teenage women who have not yet got married as 'spinsters'. In addition, early marriage is closely related to poverty. Poverty is one of the critical factors which contribute to child marriages (Bhanji & Punjani, 2014; Nur et al., 2016). Madurese parents tend to marry off their daughters so that they will not be responsible for them. However, they are not aware of the early marriage effects that will be experienced by their daughters; one of these is the high death rate of mother and infant. The high number of early marriages significantly contributes to the death rate of mothers when they are giving birth. A survey in 2012 indicated 359 cases of mothers' deaths per a hundred thousand births. This is higher than the result of a survey in 2007 which revealed 228 cases of mothers' deaths per a hundred thousand births (Ningtyas, 2014). Another impact of early marriage is the education problem where lots of women do not continue their studies. As the result, they are relying too much on their husbands in terms of economics. This potentially leads to the high divorce rate, in accordance with the study by Velotti et al. (2015). A total of 229 newlywed couples reported their habitual use of emotional suppression and the perceived negative effect on marital quality at two points in time: 5 months and 2 years after marriage.

Based on the aforementioned explanation, the present study is carried out to delineate the background of early marriage and cultural stigma of

Madurese young women. The phenomenon of early marriage is closely related to various ecological factors that influence society health. The results of this study are determined through the process of socio-ecology including several factors: individual, peers, family, and society. This is consistent with the theory that health ecology is behavior and diseases, controlled by various levels of social factors (Shumaker, Sally et al., 2009).

2 METHOD

2.1 Design of Research

The type of this study was descriptive observational. The present study was conducted at Wonokoyo village, Kedung Kandang subdistrict in the Malang municipality during September and October 2015. The descriptive analysis used percentages, averages in terms of means and modes, and was conducted to present the background of early marriage and cultural stigma of Madurese young women. Moreover, it also attempted to delineate in-depth perceptions of the participants about the cultural stigma of early marriage maintained in Madurese culture. It was carried out to investigate the complexity of human beings and provide a good understanding about the uniqueness of the Madurese culture.

2.2 Sample

The population were Madurese women aged from 12 to 20 years, at Wonokoyo village in Malang, and were purposively selected as participants. Based on a survey, Wonokoyo is a village in which the majority of the people adhere to Madurese culture. This village is further divided into 5 community groups (RW) and 6 neighbourhood groups (RT). Furthermore, 40 teenage women, either married or single, were selected purposively as the participants of this study. They were 19 (47.5%) married women and 21 (52.5%) single women.

The data was collected through semi-structured interviews, observation, and documentation analysis. The interviews were conducted at the participants' houses. They were encouraged to convey in-depth perceptions about the tradition of early marriage and cultural stigma addressed to Madurese young women.

3 RESULTS

The tradition of early marriage is still preserved by the ethnicity of the Madurese. The teenage single women will be judged as 'spinsters'. There were 4 factors influencing this tradition; individual, peers, family, and society. The data about the age of participants, their parents (mother and father), and their first pregnancy is presented in the following Tables 1, 2 and 3.

Table 1: Age of participants and their parents.

Age	n	Min.	Max	Mean
Participants	40	12	20	17.53
Mother	40	30	55	39.82
Father	40	33	66	44.85

Table 1 above showed that the age of participants was between 12 to 20 with an average of 17.53. The age of the mothers was from 30 to 55 with an average of 39.82. Moreover, the age of fathers was between 33 and 66 with an average of 44.85. From the aforementioned data, it could be estimated that the youngest mother was 18 years old when she was giving birth.

Table 2: Age of the married participants.

Age of participants when getting married	Frequency	Percentage (%)
13	1	4.8
14	2	9.5
15	4	19.0
16	0	0
17	7	33.3
18	3	14.3
19	2	9.5
20	2	9.5
Total	21	100

Table 2 shows the age of the 21 married participants. The data shows that the youngest woman got married at 13 and the oldest at 20, with the average of marriage age being 17 (33.3%).

Through interviews, it was revealed that among the 21 married participants, 1 (4.8%) had experienced divorce. Her first marriage happened when she was 14, and she was divorced at 17, then she had her second marriage soon afterwards.

Table 3: Age of the participants' first pregnancy.

Age of participants when having married	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Have not been pregnant	5	23.8
13	1	4.8
14	0	0
15	3	14.3
16	1	4.8
17	4	19.0
18	4	19.0
19	2	9.5
20	1	4.8
Total	21	100

Based on the Table 3, it was found that the youngest participant was 13 years old when she had her first pregnancy.

3.1 Individual Factors

The individual factors behind the behavior of early marriage in young women of the Madura tribe are knowledge, which is identified from the last education of the respondent, the competence and the social skills, and the perception on marriage. The details of their education was presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Participants' education.

Education	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Elementary school	21	52.5
Junior high school	15	37.5
Senior high school	4	10
University level	0	0
Total	40	100

As shown in Table 4, almost all participants (90%) were elementary and junior high level graduates. The interviews revealed that only 4 participants (10%) continued their study to the higher level.

Through the observation and interviews, it was also found that the participants did not have certain skills and abilities. Their everyday activities were being a housewife, helping their parents at home, taking care of the baby for the married or some of them were laborers.

Individual perception played an important role in determining the participants' perspectives about early marriage. Those who supported the tradition of early marriage argued that it was the tradition of the Madurese. Moreover, they also assumed that early marriage was one of the ways to avoid casual sex and prejudices.

One of the participants said,

“Early marriage is fun. In Madurese tradition and culture, it is a common behavior to avoid free sex and prejudices. If we get married later than 17 years old, we will be judged as ‘spinsters’”.

Another opinion was that, through the early marriage, they would not rely on their parents in terms of finance and economics. They never regretted what they had done. One of the participants said,

“Early marriage is a destiny, and so is the divorce. We did not need to regret them. If there is a person who get divorced and she gets married for the second time, it means that she has more than one partner”.

This was quite different with the perception given by single (unmarried) participants. They stated that early marriage was disadvantageous to them since they relied too much on their husbands. They demanded equal rights and obligations as men. They each have a strong desire to pursue the highest education and hold an ideal job. One of them said:

“I am not interested in an early marriage. I want to pursue my highest education and get a good job, so that I can improve the financial condition of my family. After that, I am going to get married”.

In addition, this group of participants was also aware of the negative effects of early marriage. They understood that it contributed to the high rate of divorce as well as mother and infant death. Another one of them said:

“I disagree with early marriage, because of frequent fights and divorce, damaging the future, reducing the playing period, and causing the child to be neglected and disturbing the child psychologically”.

3.2 Peer Factors

Ecological factors of peers behind the behavior of early marriage is related to social interaction and social response. Social interaction played great influence towards the perspective of Madurese teenage woman. The results of interviews showed that the biggest motivation for them is to want to have early marriage was because of their peers. Their peers have been married, so that they did not have any friends. That was why, because of being afraid of being judged as ‘spinsters’, they decided to get married.

3.3 Family Factors

Family factors as a background of early marriage are parent’s competencies identified by education, experience, parental knowledge of the impact of

young marriage, and socioeconomic factors. Tables 5 and 6 showed the parent’s level of education.

Table 5: Education level of fathers.

Education	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Never have formal education	5	12.5
Elementary school	30	75
Junior high school	4	10
Senior high school	1	2.5
Total	40	100

Table 6: Education level of mothers

Education	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Never have formal education	5	12.5
Elementary school	34	85
Junior high school	1	2.5
Senior high school	0	0
Total	40	100

It was found in Table 5 and Table 6 that the majority of the parents, either fathers or mothers, were elementary level graduates. The implication was that they were not well-informed about health problems and the effects of early marriage. It was proven by the results of interviews in which they stated that they did not know the potential problems arising from early marriage.

In addition, social economics of the family are also influenced the tradition of early marriage. The following Table 7 presents the occupation and monthly income of the parents.

Table 7: Parents’ occupations.

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Laborer	18	45
Seller	2	5
Parker	1	2.5
Scavenger	2	5
Farmer	3	7.5
Driver	3	7.5
Factory worker	11	27.5
Total	40	100

Table 8: Monthly parents’ income.

Income IDR	n	Min	Max	Average
	40	150.000	1.800.000	773.250

Table 7 and Table 8 show that the parents’ occupations were mostly as laborers (45%) and

factory workers (27.5%), while their income was very low between IDR 150.000 to IDR 1.800.000, with their average income being IDR 773.250. This data indicated that they were poor families and lived in poverty.

3.4 Society Factor

Another factor that influenced early marriage in Madurese ethnics was the society factor. It was closely related to religion and culture. Madurese was well-known as a religious ethnicity. They maintained religion values and social norms existed in the society. In this case, the relationship between a man and a woman without marital or family status would be considered as a violation. It potentially led to casual sex and pregnancy (without marital status).

The results of interviews with public figures of Wonokoyo village revealed that early marriage was a common tradition of the Madurese ethnicity. Parents would do anything to wed their daughters even though they were still teenagers. It was consistent with what the parents said. They stated that early marriage was not a disgrace that must be avoided. It was the best way to keep their daughters away from the dangerous effects of casual sex and pregnancy without the marital status.

4 DISCUSSION

The ethnicity of the Madurese at Wonokoyo village still conserves the tradition of early marriage. One of the purposes of the early marriage is to avoid violation of religion values and social norms. This opinion is relevant to Bennett (2015). In line with the opinion of Bennett, parents marry off their children at a young age, as a way to fulfill their need for freedom, their wish to love in a culturally respectable frame (Segal-Engelchin et al., 2016).

Early marriage is dangerous and is a form of child abuse, especially for young women. Physical dangers are immature reproductive organs, that have a high risk of infant and maternal mortality, and other complications are transmitting HIV and carcinoma of cervix (Santhya et al., 2010 & Hong Le et al., 2014). Psychological threat is the existence of mental stress due to increased responsibility in the family, not being prepared for the baby, and other responsibilities as a young wife. Early marriage also robs children's rights to receive a decent education, get the affection of their parents and also other roles in the family and community (Yüksel-Kaptanoğlu & Ergöçmen, 2014).

Although the law prohibits it, the practice of early marriage is still applied and has become a culture in some Madurese communities. This is in accordance with the findings of Innocenti Research Center (2001) and Santhya (2011), that early marriage carries serious risks for children or adolescents. Early marriage not only eliminates the chances of children getting an education, but can also endanger their social and emotional development and health (Hong Le et al., 2014). Other consequences can include:

- dropping out of school;
- health risks that result from early sexual activity and pregnancy, including sexually transmitted diseases;
- child malnutrition and mortality.

There is also a concern that early marriage deprives girls of their basic human rights and puts them at risk of harmful practices, exploitation, intimate partner violence, and abuse (Hotchkiss et al., 2016).

As seen from the result of this study, those who agreed with the tradition believe that early marriage is fun. This is closely related to the internal factors, which are cognition and reasoning (Homzah & Sulaeman, 2014). Furthermore, another finding revealed that being judged as a 'spinster' is their primary motivation to get an early marriage. It seems as if they have a problem with their self concept and efficacy. They are not well-equipped with good insights and understanding about marriage and family; this is due to their young ages. Consequently, they are not able to be such a realistic person and think wisely. In addition to this fact, they have a low level of education since the majority of them are elementary school graduates. This condition makes them isolated from the advancement of information and technology. Moreover, limited social interaction doesn't allow them to have alternative choices to broaden their communication networks. It potentially encourages them to get an early marriage. This opinion is supported by Kamal and Hassan in Bhanji & Punjani (2014) when they say that women's education is one of the significant determinants of child marriage. This is also supported by Sabbe et al. in Bhanji & Punjani (2014) who affirm that the attainment of education is one of the important determining factors of marriage.

As seen from family and social factors, early marriage is maintained as a cultural tradition. The ethnicity of Madurese will perceive teenage woman as 'spinsters' if they do not get married until 17.

This kind of phenomenon also exists in West Java, especially in Purwakarta, Cianjur, Majalengka, Sukabumi and Garut. They believe that being a widow is better than being a spinster. Even in Indramayu, there is a belief that parents are proud of their daughters who have married many times. Most of the society, including in East Java, believe in a principal that women are not allowed to refuse a marriage proposal by a man, otherwise they will be a spinster (Homzah & Sulaeman, 2014). Lack of knowledge and education of the parents becomes the main cause of less understanding about marriage and human reproduction. Moreover, social economic factors also drive the parents to find a husband for their daughters, so that they will not have to endure their daughters' needs. This opinion is supported by Bhanji & Punjani (2014), that poverty is also one of the critical factors which contribute to child marriages. This opinion was also supported by Envuladu et al. (2016) who found that most of the married respondents (46%) said they were forced into marriage by their parents, and got married because they needed money to go to school.

In addition, Homzah and Sulaeman (2014) argued that a good understanding about religious values contributes to the decision of having an early marriage. Parents always follow their cleric's suggestion to 'marry off' their daughters when they are proposed to by a man.

5 CONCLUSIONS

Early marriage in Madurese ethnicity is not only an issue, but also a fossilized tradition. Early marriage should be reduced due to physical, psychological, and social risks. In terms of the physical risks, early marriage causes various complications of reproductive organs. It contributes to the miscarriage and the ultimate death of mother and infant during childbirth. In addition, early marriage may also transmit HIV and carcinoma of cervix. Moreover, as seen from psychological risks, early marriage makes a woman experience stress and mental pressure because of the new role as a wife and mother. In this situation, the family risks being involved in a quarrel that will stimulate social problems, causing disharmony as a result of their childish behaviors which may lead to divorce.

Understanding the dangers of early marriage and reproductive health is very important. The society should be equipped with good insights and knowledge about reproductive health and the effects of early marriage. Society empowerment can also be

another alternative to reducing the number of early marriages (Ife & Tesoriero, 2008). It can be implemented through the active participation of all stakeholders. All components of society include family, community leaders, religious leaders, and the government, who must commit to suppressing the number of early marriages. They have to contribute actively to the development of social empowerment in order to build a healthy society. Maternal and infant deaths from early marriages should be prevented. This is important in preventing the undesirable impacts on children and families.

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