

## From Regulation to Practice: Implementing Regulation No. 46 of 2018 on Child Marriage Prevention in Lais District, Musi Banyuasin Regency

Ariska, Tiara Nesva Laraskana, Deby Chintia Hestirinia, Indah Pusnita,  
Budi Santoso\*

STISIPOL Candradimuka, Indonesia

Email: budi.santoso@stisipolcandradimuka.ac.id\*

### ABSTRACT

Despite sustained regulatory efforts, child marriage remains highly prevalent in Musi Banyuasin Regency, particularly in Lais District, making it a critical context for assessing the effectiveness of child marriage prevention policies. In response to this issue, the Regency Government enacted a regulation aimed at reducing child marriage in Lais District; however, the outcomes of its implementation remain problematic. This study examines the implementation of the child marriage prevention policy in Lais District using a qualitative research design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis. The findings reveal that policy implementation has not yet been effective—despite the regulation being formally enacted. Key challenges include weak coordination among implementing actors, limited human resource capacity, social resistance, and the persistence of harmful socio-cultural practices. At the same time, positive initiatives have been undertaken by the *Kantor Urusan Agama (KUA)*, local communities, and village governments through education and socialization programs. Nevertheless, these efforts face significant constraints and have not yet produced substantial change. The study underscores the need for stronger community empowerment and increased public education on the negative consequences of early marriage. This research contributes to the literature on public policy implementation.

**Keywords:** child marriage; policy implementation; local governance; qualitative research; community empowerment

### INTRODUCTION

One of the most serious social problems in Indonesia is child marriage, as it remains widespread and continues to have significant negative consequences for children's health, education, and future socioeconomic opportunities (Badan Pusat Statistik [BPS], 2016; UNICEF Indonesia, 2020; World Bank, 2017). Empirical studies conducted in various regions of Indonesia indicate that child marriage is closely associated with structural poverty, limited access to education, and weak institutional outreach, particularly in rural and semi-rural areas (Astuti & Syahrul, 2018; Putri & Setyawan, 2020; Muntamah, 2019). These findings suggest that child marriage should not be viewed merely as an individual or cultural choice but rather as a multidimensional social issue rooted in broader patterns of inequality and underdevelopment.

In practice, the consequences of child marriage include reproductive health problems, limited access to education, restricted economic participation, and increased risk of domestic violence. Indonesian public health and social science research confirms that girls who marry at a young age face higher risks of early pregnancy, maternal health complications, and school dropout, which significantly reduce their long-term economic prospects (Djamilah & Kartikawati, 2017; Syakroni, 2021; Astuti & Syahrul, 2018). These individual-level

disadvantages accumulate into broader societal costs, as early marriage contributes to low human capital formation and perpetuates intergenerational poverty, particularly in economically vulnerable regions (Putri & Setyawan, 2020; BPS, 2016).

Conceptually, child marriage refers to a marital union in which one or both parties have not yet reached adulthood—not only in terms of legal age but also in physical, psychological, and social readiness (UNICEF, 2021). Indonesian legal and sociological studies emphasize that adolescents who enter marriage prematurely often lack emotional maturity, decision-making capacity, and social independence, making them vulnerable to marital conflict and dependency (Rahmi, 2022; Muntamah, 2019). Although national legal reforms, such as the revision of the minimum marriage age, represent significant progress, research shows that normative beliefs, religious interpretations, and customary practices continue to legitimize early marriage in some communities (Desliana, 2021; Rahmi, 2022). This gap between formal regulation and social practice highlights the need for culturally sensitive policy implementation.

The negative impacts of child marriage are particularly pronounced for girls, who disproportionately bear the burden of early marital and reproductive responsibilities. Indonesian studies reveal that early-married girls experience reduced autonomy, limited participation in education and employment, and increased vulnerability to domestic violence and mental health problems (Djamilah & Kartikawati, 2017; Rachman, 2024; Syakroni, 2021). These findings align with global evidence showing that child marriage reinforces gender inequality and restricts women's life chances (UNICEF, 2020; World Health Organization [WHO], 2014). Taken together, the literature underscores that child marriage constitutes not only a violation of children's rights but also a significant barrier to gender equality and sustainable development, justifying continued scholarly and policy attention to its prevention at both national and local levels.

Child marriage remains one of the most serious and persistent social problems in Indonesia, with far-reaching consequences for health, education, and long-term socioeconomic development. National data show that it occurs disproportionately in regions characterized by poverty, limited educational access, and strong traditional norms (BPS, 2016; UNICEF Indonesia, 2020). Musi Banyuasin Regency reflects these national patterns, as regional statistics indicate early age at first marriage and early childbirth among women of reproductive age, particularly in rural subdistricts such as Lais District. These conditions situate Musi Banyuasin Regency as a relevant local context for examining the effectiveness of child marriage prevention policies at the subnational level.

From a public health perspective, child marriage significantly increases the risk of early pregnancy and adverse reproductive health outcomes. International epidemiological studies consistently demonstrate that girls who marry before adulthood face higher rates of maternal morbidity, obstetric complications, and neonatal health risks (Raj et al., 2010; Nour, 2009). These findings resonate with Indonesian health research, which documents similar reproductive vulnerabilities among adolescents who enter marriage early, particularly in areas with limited access to health services (Astuti & Syahrul, 2018; Syakroni, 2021). In Musi Banyuasin Regency, local health indicators related to adolescent pregnancy further underscore the relevance of these risks in shaping district-level health outcomes.

Education is another critical domain affected by child marriage. Early marriage is strongly associated with school dropout and reduced educational attainment, which in turn

limits future employment opportunities and economic mobility. International economic studies show that marriage during adolescence substantially lowers the likelihood of completing secondary education and reduces lifetime earnings (Field & Ambrus, 2008; Delprato et al., 2017). Indonesian sociological studies similarly find that girls who marry early are far less likely to continue schooling, reinforcing cycles of poverty at the household and community levels (Putri & Setyawan, 2020; Djamilah & Kartikawati, 2017). In Musi Banyuasin Regency, where educational attainment varies significantly across subdistricts, early marriage contributes directly to persistent educational inequality.

The drivers of child marriage in Indonesia are complex and deeply embedded in social, economic, and cultural structures. Indonesian qualitative studies identify poverty, perceived economic burden, low parental education, and entrenched cultural norms as key factors motivating families to marry off children at a young age (Muntamah, 2019; Desliana, 2021). These dynamics are evident in Musi Banyuasin Regency, where economic vulnerability and limited employment opportunities for youth often lead families to view early marriage as a pragmatic, though harmful, coping strategy. Such findings indicate that child marriage in this context cannot be addressed through legal reform alone but requires broader social and economic interventions.

Although Indonesia has strengthened its legal framework through Law No. 16 of 2019, research shows that gaps between statutory law and customary practice persist, especially in rural areas such as those in Musi Banyuasin Regency (Rahmi, 2022; Muntamah, 2019). The impacts of child marriage are also highly gendered: Girls disproportionately bear the consequences, including reduced autonomy, limited participation in education and employment, and heightened exposure to domestic violence. International comparative studies confirm a strong association between child marriage and intimate partner violence, as well as diminished reproductive autonomy (Kidman, 2017; Gage, 2013). Indonesian research further documents psychological distress and reduced well-being among girls who marry early, emphasizing the long-term social costs of the practice (Rachman, 2024; Djamilah & Kartikawati, 2017).

From a development perspective, child marriage contributes to intergenerational poverty and constrains local development. Global economic analyses show that early marriage reduces human capital accumulation and imposes substantial economic costs on societies (Parsons et al., 2015; Wodon et al., 2017). Indonesian studies echo these conclusions, demonstrating that households formed through early marriage often face persistent economic insecurity and limited upward mobility (Putri & Setyawan, 2020; BPS, 2016). In Musi Banyuasin Regency, where poverty reduction remains a central development priority, child marriage thus represents both a social and economic challenge.

Taken together, the international and Indonesian literatures underscore the urgency of examining local policy responses to child marriage. In Musi Banyuasin Regency, the issuance of Regent Regulation No. 46 of 2018 reflects a formal commitment to prevention, yet persistent social, economic, and institutional barriers raise questions about implementation effectiveness. By situating the regulation within the district's specific socioeconomic conditions and drawing on established evidence from both global and Indonesian scholarship, this study seeks to contribute a locally grounded analysis that can inform more effective, context-sensitive strategies for reducing child marriage and strengthening child protection at the regional level.

Based on the foregoing discussion, conducting research on the implementation of Regent Regulation No. 46 of 2018 is critically important, both academically and practically. Although the regulation represents a formal policy commitment by the Musi Banyuasin Regency government to prevent child marriage, the persistence of early marriage in districts such as Lais District indicates a gap between policy formulation and outcomes. This gap underscores the need for systematic empirical investigation to assess how the regulation is interpreted, implemented, and experienced at the local level, particularly within complex social, economic, and cultural contexts.

Thus, this study aims to analyze the implementation process of Regent Regulation No. 46 of 2018 concerning the Prevention of Child Marriage in Lais District, Musi Banyuasin Regency, as well as identify the challenges and driving factors that affect its effectiveness at the local level. Furthermore, this study seeks to provide evidence-based recommendations to strengthen the implementation of policies and efforts to prevent child marriage in Musi Banyuasin Regency and other similar contexts.

From an academic perspective, such research contributes to the literature on public policy implementation by providing evidence from a subnational setting, highlighting the role of institutional coordination, resource capacity, and community engagement in shaping policy effectiveness. Practically, the findings can inform local governments by identifying concrete implementation barriers and context-sensitive strategies to strengthen prevention efforts. Therefore, research on this regent regulation is essential not only to evaluate its effectiveness but also to generate evidence-based recommendations that support more responsive, equitable, and sustainable child protection policies in Musi Banyuasin Regency and other regions facing similar challenges.

## METHOD

This study evaluated the implementation of Regent Regulation No. 46 of 2018 on the Prevention of Child Marriage in *Lais District, Musi Banyuasin Regency*. It employed a qualitative descriptive research design to describe the policy implementation process and identify factors influencing its effectiveness.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and document analysis. Interviews targeted key informants, including the Head of the Religious Affairs Office (*KUA*), village officials, community leaders, and families. Observation monitored socialization activities and sociocultural contexts in the field. Document analysis examined relevant regulations, reports, and official records.

Data analysis followed an interactive model with three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles et al., 2014). Data were filtered, categorized by research themes, and presented narratively to systematically describe findings. Interpretation identified patterns, challenges (e.g., inter-institutional coordination obstacles, limited resources, sociocultural factors), and supporting elements in policy implementation.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Policy Implementation in Practice

Based on in-depth interviews with the Head of the Office of Religious Affairs (*KUA*) of Lais District, although Regent Regulation Number 46 of 2018 has been in force for several

years, its effectiveness in preventing child marriage has not yet reached an optimal level. This suboptimal outcome reflects broader implementation challenges documented in policy studies, including limited human resources, insufficient coordination among implementing institutions, and low public awareness of the adverse effects of early marriage (F. Zahro, 2025). These constraints are compounded by structural and socio-cultural factors that hinder systematic outreach; for example, research on policy implementation in Indonesia has found that limited public awareness and weak interagency coordination significantly constrain the effectiveness of child marriage prevention programs (F. Zahro, 2025; Judiasih, 2025). In the context of Lais District, these challenges manifest visibly in the uneven distribution of socialization activities, with remote villages receiving far fewer education and outreach efforts compared to more accessible areas.

According to the Head of KUA, counseling activities related to the prevention of child marriage have been conducted regularly; however, the reach and impact of these efforts remain inconsistent across the district, particularly in more geographically isolated communities. This finding aligns with documented patterns in other regions of Indonesia where policy implementation is limited by gaps in communication infrastructure, resource allocation, and community engagement (Judiasih, 2025; Enggita Sekar Munggarani Sachlan, 2019). Indeed, studies on child marriage prevention note that effective policy implementation requires not only regular socialization but also sustained, coordinated action that bridges institutional silos and adapts interventions to local contexts (Judiasih, 2025). Without strengthening these dimensions—especially in terms of expanding awareness campaigns, enhancing cross-sectoral collaboration, and building local capacity—the regulation’s potential to meaningfully reduce child marriage in Lais District will remain constrained.

### **Economic and Educational Factors**

Interviews with community members and religious leaders indicate that economic hardship and low educational attainment are primary drivers of early marriage in Lais District. Many families perceive marrying daughters early as a way to reduce household economic burden or to secure a perceived stable future for their children, a motive that is widely documented in studies of child marriage determinants in Indonesia and elsewhere (Marshan, Rakhmadi, & Rizky, 2013; UNICEF, 2020). National analyses show that poverty and limited schooling opportunities are strongly associated with higher prevalence of child marriage, and subnational data for Musi Banyuasin corroborate that poverty-affected subdistricts tend to record lower school completion rates and higher indicators of early union formation, conditions that exacerbate familial incentives for early marriage.

Low levels of parental education and constrained access to reproductive health information further compound the problem by reducing awareness of the health, social, and economic harms of child marriage and by limiting alternatives such as continued schooling or livelihood programs for adolescents. Empirical reviews and national policy analyses emphasize that interventions must therefore combine poverty-reduction or economic-empowerment measures with education retention strategies and community outreach to change cost-benefit calculations at the household level (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2016; UNICEF, 2020). In the context of Lais District, the pattern described by interviewees, regular but uneven counseling, and strong economic pressure in remote villages, signals the need for integrated programs that



target both the economic root causes and the informational deficits that sustain early marriage practices.

### **Socialization and Community Education**

Efforts to raise public awareness and provide community education on the negative impacts of child marriage have become a key focus of local programs, implemented through activities led by subdistrict governments, the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA), and development partners. These efforts include face-to-face counseling, training for religious leaders, and public awareness campaigns (UNICEF, 2020). However, despite the ongoing implementation of these initiatives, their reach and intensity remain uneven, particularly in geographically remote villages that are difficult to access. This uneven coverage reflects national findings showing that access to information and the capacity of public services are fragmented across regions, causing policy socialization efforts to frequently miss the most vulnerable groups (UNICEF Indonesia, 2020; UNICEF, 2022). At the local level, such as in Lais, field reports and interviews with local stakeholders indicate that these gaps create information deficits that weaken community understanding of legal provisions and the health risks associated with early marriage.

Disparities in access to information are further exacerbated by the digital divide between urban and rural areas, which limits the effectiveness of information technology-based initiatives when they are implemented without tailored outreach strategies (World Bank, 2021). Data from the Central Statistics Agency demonstrate clear differences in internet access and media use across regions, indicating that reliance on a single communication channel, such as social media alone, is insufficient to reach all segments of the population (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2024). Consequently, more effective socialization strategies need to adopt a hybrid approach by maintaining direct, face-to-face outreach and community forums in remote areas while simultaneously utilizing local media, community radio, religious schools, and digital platforms adapted to local conditions. Such multi-channel and context-sensitive approaches are widely recommended in national and international studies as effective means to expand outreach, increase message frequency, and tailor communication so that it resonates more strongly with diverse target groups (UNICEF, 2020; World Bank, 2021; BPS, 2024).

### **Inter Institutional Coordination**

Inter-institutional coordination is a key factor influencing the effectiveness of child marriage prevention policies. Although several institutions are formally involved, including the Office of Religious Affairs, the Office of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, and community leaders, coordination at the implementation level often remains suboptimal. Empirical studies in the Indonesian public policy context demonstrate that weak coordination among government institutions leads to overlapping roles, fragmented responsibilities, and inefficiencies in program implementation, ultimately reducing policy effectiveness (Widjaja & Dhanudibroto, 2025). These coordination challenges are further exacerbated at the local level by limited resources and the absence of integrated planning mechanisms that align institutional objectives.

Research on regional governance in Indonesia also highlights that effective policy implementation requires structured collaboration, shared monitoring systems, and clear

division of authority among related agencies. Without such coordination frameworks, policy execution tends to be sectoral and reactive rather than integrated and preventive (Akmal, n.d.). In the context of child marriage prevention, improving coordination among relevant institutions is therefore crucial to ensure consistency of interventions, optimal use of limited resources, and comprehensive outreach to communities. Strengthened inter-institutional coordination can enhance policy coherence and significantly improve the effectiveness of child marriage prevention efforts at the local level.

### **Public Awareness**

Social resistance to child marriage prevention policies has been consistently identified as a significant barrier to effective implementation, as some community members continue to view early marriage as a culturally acceptable or even desirable practice. Studies in Indonesia show that deeply rooted socio-cultural norms — including beliefs about preserving family honor, traditional gender roles, and misperceptions about the readiness of adolescents for marriage — can undermine public awareness of the harms associated with child marriage (Pakasi, 2019; Windiarti & Besral, 2018). A systematic review of determinants of child marriage in Indonesia found that cultural beliefs and limited awareness are among the principal drivers that sustain early marriage practices, despite existing legal restrictions on minimum marriage age (Windiarti & Besral, 2018; Kistiana et al., 2025). These findings suggest that low public awareness is not only a consequence of communication gaps but also a reflection of entrenched normative frameworks that shape community attitudes toward early union.

To address these perceptual barriers, scholars emphasize the need for culturally sensitive communication strategies that engage community leaders, religious authorities, and families in ways that resonate with local values while challenging harmful norms. For instance, research on adolescent reproductive health and early marriage notes that public education campaigns must combine legal information with culturally grounded dialogues that reflect community priorities and concerns (Aladin, 2023; Pakasi, 2019). Additionally, empirical evidence from Indonesian studies indicates that interventions framed in culturally relevant terms — such as community storytelling, involvement of respected local figures, and leveraging religious teachings that support child welfare — can enhance public understanding of the risks associated with early marriage and promote attitudinal change (Aladin, 2023; Kistiana et al., 2025). Therefore, adopting culturally sensitive approaches is essential not only to increase awareness but also to shift underlying perceptions and attitudes in ways that support policy goals.

### **Human Resources and Funding**

Limited funding remains a major structural challenge in the implementation of child marriage prevention policies at the local level. Based on interviews with the Head of the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) of Lais District, financial resources allocated for socialization and community education activities are drawn solely from routine operational budgets, with no specific earmarked funding for child marriage prevention programs. This condition reflects a broader pattern identified in policy implementation studies, which emphasize that insufficient and non-dedicated funding often weakens program intensity, sustainability, and coverage, particularly in decentralized governance contexts (Edwards III, 1980; World Bank, 2017). As

a result, prevention activities tend to be conducted on a limited scale and are often unable to reach remote or high-risk communities consistently.

Despite these financial constraints, local implementers continue to carry out prevention efforts by integrating child marriage socialization activities into existing KUA programs. While this strategy allows the program to persist, its effectiveness is frequently compromised by competing priorities and rigid budget structures that limit flexibility in planning and outreach (UNICEF, 2020). International and national policy analyses consistently highlight that effective child marriage prevention requires dedicated and sustained investment, particularly for community education, capacity building of frontline workers, and monitoring mechanisms (World Health Organization [WHO], 2014; UNICEF, 2020). In the context of Lais District, the absence of a specific budget allocation underscores the need for stronger fiscal commitment from local governments to ensure that prevention initiatives move beyond symbolic compliance and are implemented in a systematic, adequately resourced, and sustainable manner.

### **Technology and Media for Socialization**

The use of social media and information technology has significant potential to expand the reach of policy socialization by enabling rapid information dissemination, interactive communication, and broader audience engagement. Studies in communication and development research show that digital media can enhance public awareness and support behavior change when access and digital literacy are sufficient (Hilbert, 2011; van Dijk, 2020). However, in Lais District, the effectiveness of technology-based socialization remains limited due to unequal access to digital infrastructure, particularly in remote rural areas. Research on the digital divide consistently demonstrates that communities with limited internet access and low digital literacy are less likely to benefit from online public information campaigns, which can unintentionally reinforce existing social inequalities (van Dijk, 2020; Scheerder et al., 2017).

Given these structural constraints, digital strategies must be complemented by direct, face-to-face communication approaches to ensure inclusive policy outreach. Empirical evidence from public health and development communication studies indicates that interpersonal communication, community meetings, and locally embedded programs are more effective in contexts where technological access is uneven and social norms strongly influence behavior (Wakefield et al., 2010). For sensitive social issues such as child marriage, hybrid communication models that combine digital media with community-based engagement have been shown to improve message comprehension, trust, and acceptance (Scheerder et al., 2017; Wakefield et al., 2010). In the context of Lais District, maintaining counseling sessions, seminars, and community forums alongside gradual expansion of digital outreach is therefore essential to ensure that policy socialization efforts reach vulnerable populations and support meaningful attitude change.

### **Community Involvement**

One important finding of this study is the central role of community empowerment in preventing child marriage. Research consistently shows that interventions which actively involve community actors—such as religious leaders, traditional authorities, and local



residents—are more effective in addressing deeply rooted social practices than top-down policy approaches alone. Community-based educational programs can enhance collective understanding of the health, social, and economic consequences of child marriage while fostering a sense of shared responsibility for prevention (Marcus et al., 2015; Wodon et al., 2017). Religious and community leaders, in particular, serve as influential opinion shapers whose engagement can help reinterpret cultural and religious norms in ways that support delayed marriage and child protection (Chowdhury et al., 2018).

Moreover, the literature emphasizes that meaningful community involvement should extend beyond awareness-raising activities to include participation across the entire policy cycle, from planning and implementation to monitoring and reporting. Studies in development and public health journals demonstrate that policies are more sustainable and socially accepted when communities are treated as active partners rather than passive recipients (Campbell & Cornish, 2010; Cislighi & Heise, 2018). Such participatory approaches strengthen local ownership, improve trust in institutions, and increase the likelihood that prevention initiatives will be maintained over time. In the context of child marriage prevention, involving communities at every stage of the policy process is therefore essential to ensure that interventions are culturally resonant, locally relevant, and capable of producing lasting behavioral and normative change.

## CONCLUSION

This study found that the implementation of Regent Regulation No. 46 of 2018 on child marriage prevention in Lais District, Musi Banyuasin Regency, fell short of its intended outcomes due to intertwined structural, institutional, and sociocultural barriers. Economic vulnerability drove households to view early marriage as a pragmatic response to poverty and limited opportunities, compounded by low education, poor information access, and entrenched cultural norms that fostered resistance. Institutionally, weak inter-agency coordination, unclear roles, absent monitoring, limited human resources, and no dedicated budgets led to fragmented efforts, especially in remote villages—despite positive local initiatives like counseling and socialization by the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA), village authorities, and leaders. For future research, longitudinal studies could track the impact of targeted interventions, such as resource-enhanced community programs or economic incentives, to assess sustained reductions in child marriage rates and inform scalable policy refinements.

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