Being A Young Widow Or A Spinster: Dilemma Of Young Women In Tengger Tribe

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Abstract—Marriage is a life cycle that cannot be separated from the culture of Indonesian society. Indonesia consists of diverse tribes and each tribe has its own value on marriages. Early marriage is common among the Tengger tribe that placed in District Tosari. It is found that 59% women first married at age 15-19 years. However, it is not accompanied by the readiness of the young women, especially readiness to become pregnant and give birth at young age. Pregnant and gave birth at young age lead to maternal and child health. Throughout 2014, there were 6 cases of infant mortality in women aged under 20 years throughout 2014. Besides triggering infant mortality, incidence of early marriage in the Tengger tribe also trigger the high divorce rate. This paper aims to give an overview of the phenomenon of early marriage among young women in Tengger tribe. The study was conducted with a qualitative approach in the group of women who were married before 20 years in Tengger tribe, in East Java, Indonesia. This study found reasons that encourage young women did early marriage were because their desire to marry because they thought they were ready and eager to settle down, then because their pregnant before marriage, and their fears if they considered as a spinster by the people in their neighborhood. Although many examples of early marriage that ended in divorce at young age, the phenomenon of early marriage remains currently happened among young women in Tengger tribe.

Keywords— Early marriage, Tengger tribe, Young women

I. INTRODUCTION

Early marriage is a phenomenon related to the socio-economic conditions in developing countries. Although it has decreased but the trend of early marriage in Indonesia is intriguing to be studied. Worldwide, more than 51 million young women marry at the age of 15-19 years and have to deal with the risk for sexual intercourse at a young age, including the risk of pregnancy at young age. Marriage is a life cycle that cannot be separated from the Indonesian culture. Indonesia consisting diverse tribes and each tribe has its own value on marriages. Indonesia is the country with the percentage of young age marriage in the world, which is ranked 37. In ASEAN, Indonesia ranked second after Cambodia. East Java Province was ranked seventh in the percentage of early marriage in Indonesia.

The practice of early marriage occurred in many areas in Indonesia. Java is one on primary area where the practice of early marriage exists. In District Tosari, a location where Tengger tribe live, early marriage is still be an issue of reproductive health. According to the Health Survey that done by Health Professional Team in Tosari, found as many as 5.9% of women married firstly before the age of 15 years and 59% married at the age of 15-19 years.

Married at a young age doesn’t accompanied by the readiness of the young women, especially readiness to become pregnant and give birth at young age. It makes the longer range of time to reproduce. Early marriage can lead to problems of pregnancy and childbirth at the young age. If there is no control over marriage and pregnancy at an early age, this can impact directly or indirectly on the health status and welfare of the family.

Based on that, we get a formulation of the problem as follows: "What Are Driving Early Marriage Phenomenon in Tosari, Indonesia?"

II. DATA AND METHOD

This research was conducted using qualitative research methods. Qualitative research is used to obtain in-depth information about the subject under study. Subjects were selected with purposive sampling techniques, with these following criterias: (1) Respondents aged up to 25 years, (2) Respondents were first married at age < 18 years. Data collected by in-depth interviews and FDG.
Besides the main respondents, addition data also collected on community leaders, unmarried adolescents, and parents of the primary respondents as triangulation respondents.

III. FINDINGS
D. Characteristic of Respondents

Tengger people in Tosari work as farmers. Generally, people who did early marriage do not have a high level of education, usually they only got on elementary or junior high school. Early marriage in Tosari occurs more frequently in women than men. This is consistent with the findings of some research that says that low levels of education limit a person to get a job and proper life\(^6\).

Some study show that young women who have access to higher education tend to be more protected from the behavior of sex before marriage, early marriage, and childbirth at an early age\(^7\).

E. Early Marriage and Reproductive Health Knowledge

Respondents know that their age of marriage is including early marriage age criteria (married before the age of 20 years).

Question: How old did you marry?

“...Eighteen...”

(R2, male, married)

Question: In your opinion, what is early marriage?

“...Married yet old enough and not allowed by parents. Seventeen years is not old enough...”

(R19, male, unmarried)

Knowledge of respondents about the age limit of marriage is same as The Act which sets the age of marriage that allowed that if a man reaches the age of 19 years and a woman reaches the age of 16 years\(^8\). While early marriage (or also called child marriage) is marriage that occurred before the child reaches the age of 18 years, before the children mature physically, physiologically, and psychologically to be responsible for marriage and children produced from the marriage\(^9\).

Respondents also realize and feel the negative effects of early marriage. Divorced respondents feel the negative impact of early marriage that caused the divorce because they don’t have the maturity in thinking and emotional maturity that trigger problems in the household. In addition, respondents also expressed negative impact of married at a young age is that young couple has not enough skills to take care of the child.

Question: In your opinion, what is the impact of early marriage?

“...Like this, divorce...”

(30, female, divorced)

Respondents who have experienced divorce feel that the lack of psychological maturity trigger an argument. As with adolescents in general, the nature of youthfulness (as unstable emotionally, yet has a good ability to resolve conflicts faced, and yet have a careful thought about the future) which is still owned that made her incapable of managing their household well so that lead to divorce. Likewise, these young mothers and fathers are further highlight the nature of adolescence rather than the nature of maternal and paternal when they have children\(^9\).

Although married at a young age, the respondents have their own views on the ideal age to get married.

Question: In your opinion, the most ideal age to marry is...?

Respondents consider that the ideal age for women to marry is around 20 years old and male around 25 years old. Unmarried respondents also stated that they wanted to get married after the age of 20-23 years (male respondents) and 19-24 years (female respondents).

Information on reproductive health is important to equip the youth before entering the household life. Unfortunately, access to information is still very limited for the respondents, both married and unmarried. Respondents who have not married and still in school obtain information on reproductive health in schools delivered by their teachers. While the married respondents claimed that they never received information about reproductive health. Related with early marriage, health workers also
played a role in providing reproductive health education to adolescents before they decided to marry. Health workers had a role in providing reproductive health education on the importance of preventing marriage at a young age as well as helping the parents in order to provide reproductive health education in the home according to stages of the child's age. Thus, health workers and parents could be a source of reliable information on the reproductive health of adolescents.

F. Early Marriage and Love Feeling on the Spouse

Female respondents stated that they decided to marry before 18 years because of their own desires and already in love with her future husband.

**Question:** In that time, you married at 17. Don’t you think that it was too fast for you?

The reason already in love with the spouse also reinforced by male respondents and respondents were unmarried.

Parents of respondents stated that they already provided prohibition and give advice for their child to delay the age of marriage but they give up because of their child is in love with the spouse. These parents do not want to take the risk if their children do something danger if they are not allowed to marry.

Data from WHO (2011) showed that girl adolescents tend to be more motivated to have a more intimate relationship with someone they love than teenage boys. Girl adolescent are more willing to be bound to a more serious relationship with a man they love if they promised gifts or money or a better life (usually by a man who was more mature).

G. Early Marriage and Unwanted Pregnancy

Unwanted pregnancy is also mentioned by respondents as a reason why they decided to marry at a young age.

**Question:** Why did you decide to marry at a young age?

Data from WHO (2011) showed that boy teenagers tend to be unable to hold the pressure from the environment to have sexual relations before marriage. Usually, boy teenagers are challenged to prove their masculinity by having sex with his boyfriend. In contrast to boy teenagers, girl teenagers tend to be under pressure of their parents not to have sex before marriage because of moral reasons. However, the insistence from their boyfriend to prove love often makes girl teenagers finally willing to have sex before marriage.

If a girl becomes pregnant before marriage, it has become a policy of the village that the woman should be married to her partner in order to avoid the bigger problem in the village. This is reinforced by the statement of the respondent's parents and community leaders.

**Question:** Your daughter got pregnant first? So, you allowed her marry?

"... I also surprised. But, what can I do?"

Society has better belief to endure the shame due to marry their daughter because of their pregnant than to make the village endure the bad consequences if their children abort the pregnancy. Society believes that abortion is not favored by "pangrewangan" (such as spirits or gods which believed by society as a resident of their village and respected by the community) so if there are an abortion, their "pangrewangan" will be angry and lead to "pageblug" (major disasters) for the village which can be such disease outbreaks or other distress.

This beliefs and values that prevail in society make all the respondents which pregnant before marriage decided to maintain their pregnancies and abortions. Widyoningsih’s study (2011) found that 7 of 8 families of adolescents who experience unwanted pregnancy do the 'ideal' thing to save their self-esteem, is with marriage celebration.

Research on youth pregnancy in Indonesia shows that there are consequences arise from unwanted pregnancy. The emergence of the social stigma associated with unwanted pregnancy lead on health and psychological problems, especially in young women.

In addition, the finding showed that if there is young adolescents asked permission to marry, the village government gave permission on this teen couple to get engaged first until their age are eligible to marry. During the engagement period, this couple is allowed to have sexual intercourse as long as they do not get pregnant.

In some cultures, the people tolerate the behavior of sexual relations before marriage with a partner which remain, be with someone which has been a girlfriend or fiancee.
**H. Early Marriage and Dilemma Between Being Young Widow or Spinster**

Surrounding environment also can be a determinant of the decision-making process of the respondents, such as peer. If a person sees their peers do something, usually it can encourage someone to do the same thing.

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<th>Question: When you see your friends marry at age 15, 16, or 17, how do you feel?</th>
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<td>“… Sometime, I want to follow them. Usually, they already married at 17 and I see they worked with their husband, got money together, sometime, we want too. People here, if we already grow up and still unmarried, they will call us spinster…”</td>
</tr>
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<td>(R13, female, unmarried)</td>
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Respondents who have not married stated that when they see their peers married, dawn their desire to marry at young age too. In addition, there are fears they will be called spinster if they are not married after the age of 19 years.

Many teens which do marriage at a young age make the phenomenon of early marriage becomes a habit which eventually considered as tradition of village. Most of the villagers say they marry off their children at a very young age due to follow the custom. Either teens or parents fear their children said spinsters so they decided to marry off their children immediately.

Nevertheless, unmarried teens say that they worry if they should be a young widow if their marriage did not succeed and lead to divorce. Unmarried respondents chose to be a spinster than a young widow.

Unmarried respondents admitted concern seeing their peers who have become a widow at young age because of the failure of their marriage. It led them to think further to take a decision to marry at young age.

Community leader respondents mentioned the cultural differences between adolescents in the city and in the village. Adolescents in the city are more likely to delay marriage age for higher education and want to get a steady job. While teens in the village, they were quite satisfied with their low education level and if they can work in the fields. They satisfied if they can earn money from farming. Meanwhile, if a woman is already work and able to make money themselves, then there is nothing to do besides marry and take care of children. So if there is a teenage girl about 19 years old and not married, they will be labeled as a spinster by society.

<table>
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<th>Question: Which one you choose, said as a young widow or spinster?</th>
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<td>“… Spinster. If a spinster, we still can marry…”</td>
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<tr>
<td>(R16, female, unmarried)</td>
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<tr>
<td>“… If young widow, mm… It means we already failed in building our household…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(R17, female, unmarried)</td>
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“Spinster” is a term that applies in society. It is resulted from values and norms in society. Meanwhile, there is no term for boys in society to show their marriage status. This implies the existence of stigma and discrimination on the female gender. Stigma and discrimination is related to the role of women in society, eg: the lack of women's role as head of the family, the lack of women’s power to take their decision.

**IV. CONCLUSION**

The most commonly reason cited by teens which doing early marriage in Tosari is due to their own desires based on their love possessed on their girl/boyfriend, unwanted pregnancies, and their fear of being called as a spinster. There are several early marriages which ended in divorce, but it does not necessarily decrease the incidence of early marriage in Tosari.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

We see the phenomenon of early marriage in Tosari has an impact not only on health side but also on the social side. Further research is still needed on the prevailing culture in the community related with early marriage.

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