

Review Article

# The effectiveness of peer information toward a change in knowledge and attitude toward child marriage: A literature review

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Child marriage is a serious global problem because it can have negative consequences for children, families, and communities. Peer information has been considered as one strategy to reduce child marriage. Objective: This study evaluated the effectiveness of peer information in changing knowledge and attitudes towards child marriage.

**Methods:** The study is carried out by systematically searching academic databases and a bibliography of relevant articles. There are 5 articles discussed from several countries and peer information is presented through group meetings or discussion forums.

**Results:** Studies in several countries show that information passed on through peers can increase understanding and positive attitudes towards child marriage. Through education, interaction with peers is effective in informing adolescents about the risks of child marriage and encouraging healthy attitudes and behaviors related to reproductive health.

**Conclusion:** Providing education through peers can be done for adolescents related to the risk of child marriage, so they will be able to determine the steps that must be taken so that the rate of child marriage decreases.

**Keywords:** attitude; change in knowledge; child marriage; peer information

## INTRODUCTION

Child marriage has been legally legalized by the Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 1 of 1974 concerning Marriage. The law allows children as young as 16 years old to marry, as stated in Article 7 paragraph 1. Article 26 of the Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 23 of 2002 concerning Child Protection states that parents are obliged to protect children from early marriage. However, both articles do not have criminal sanctions provisions, so eliminating these provisions is meaningless in protecting children from early protection threats (Oktavia et al., 2018). In fact, according to Law No. 16 of 2019, marriage should only be allowed if the man and woman have reached the age of 19 years.

The case of child marriage in Indonesia is very concerning. Based on data from the Religious Court regarding applications for child marriage dispensation, in 2021 there were 65 thousand cases and in 2022 there were 55 thousand applications. Submission of proposals at a young age is more caused by the factors of female applicants who are already pregnant and the encouragement factor of parents who want their children to get married soon because they already have close friends/dating (KemenPPPA, 2022). Indonesia ranks 37th out of 158 countries

in the world in the prevalence of child marriage. Based on the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Indonesia is in second place (Atik & Susilowati, 2022).

Child marriage is a serious global problem because it can have negative consequences for children, families, and society. Peer information has been considered one strategy to reduce child marriage, but few studies have evaluated its effectiveness. Therefore, this study evaluated the effectiveness of peer information in changing knowledge and attitudes towards child marriage.

Disaggregation by region of residence shows that the prevalence of girl-child marriage is higher in rural areas than in urban areas. This was seen in the first marriage group before the age of 18 and 15. Throughout 2018, the prevalence of women aged 20-24 years in rural areas who married for the first time before 18 years was still higher than in urban areas. The percentage of child marriage in rural areas is 16.87 percent, while in urban areas, it is only 7.15 %. However, this percentage represents a smaller decrease in prevalence in urban areas compared to the decline in rural areas over the past 10 years. This may indicate that the decline more influences the downward trend in child marriage in rural areas. In rural areas, the prevalence of women aged 20–24 years who married for the first time before the age of 15 decreased by 1.8 percentage points during the period 2008–2018 (2.78 to 0.95 %), while in urban areas, the decline was only 0.3 percentage points (0.59 points) to (0.28 %).

Similarly, women aged 20-24 years whose first marriage before the age of 18, both in rural and urban areas, experienced a downward trend in 2008-2018. The prevalence in rural areas decreased by 5.76 percentage points (22.63 to 16.87 %); in urban areas, the decline was slower, only less than one percentage point (7.82 to 7.15 %). Similarly, women aged 20-24 years whose first marriage before the age of 18,

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both in rural and urban areas, experienced a downward trend in 2008-2018. The prevalence in rural areas decreased by 5.76 percentage points (22.63 to 16.87%); in urban areas, the decline was slower, only less than one percentage point (7.82 to 7.15 %). Similarly, women aged 20-24 years whose first marriage before the age of 18, both in rural and urban areas, experienced a downward trend in 2008-2018. The prevalence in rural areas decreased by 5.76 percentage points (22.63 to 16.87%), while in urban areas, the decline was slower, only less than one percentage point (7.82 to 7.15 %) (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2020).

Causes of early marriage include coercion on the part of parents, promiscuity, curiosity about the world of sex, environmental factors, low education, and economic factors. Judging from socioeconomic problems, economic readiness usually does not follow early marriage. The older a person is, the more likely he is to mature in the socioeconomic field because, in general, with age, the urge to make a living will be stronger. In early marriage, economic problems will be the main reason for divorce (Oktavia *et al.*, 2018).

Knowledge is closely related to education. Education means the guidance given by a person to another person to achieve a specific goal. Generally, the higher a person's education, the easier it is to receive information. Another factor that influenced respondents' lack of knowledge about the risks of early marriage was personal experiences and others. This is by the theory that individual experience can also be used as an effort to gain knowledge by repeating experiences that have been achieved in solving problems faced in the past (Oktavia *et al.*, 2018). This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of peer information in changing knowledge and attitudes towards child marriage.

## METHODS

### Study Design

The design uses a literature review design. A literature review is a research method to identify, evaluate, and interpret all relevant research results related to specific research questions, specific topics, or phenomena of concern.

### Search Strategy

The search method used in this study is electronic databases such as Pubmed, Scopus, and Google Scholar. Article search using keywords according to inclusion and exclusion criteria. The keywords used in literature searches are "Child Marriage" OR "Early Marriage" AND "Fellow Information" AND "Knowledge" AND "Attitudes". Study Design used in searching for articles or journals to be reviewed is qualitative, FGD, and Demographic Survey.

### Data Extraction

Data extraction used criteria for selected journals in English in the last 5 years (2018-2023). Journal articles used are from Ethiopia, India, Niger, Namibia, Brazil, and Tanzania. Of the 23 found in literature searches "Child Marriage" OR "Early Marriage" AND "Fellow Information" AND "Knowledge" AND "Attitude," there are 10 articles that correspond to abstracts and full texts. According to the population criteria, it is children aged <18 years; the intervention used is the improvement of knowledge and attitudes of adolescents through peers; there is no comparison/comparison. The expected result is an increase in adolescents' knowledge and attitudes in reducing child marriage, so 5 articles are discussed.

## Risk of Bias and Quality Assessment

All reviewers independently assessed each included study for potential sources of bias. The completeness of the article is determined based on the results of data extraction, free abstract, and full text.

## Data Analysis

In this literature review, the data analysis used is a descriptive analysis that explains the findings in the selected article. Descriptive analysis is a statistical method that aims to provide an overview or overview of research subjects based on variable data from certain subject groups.

## RESULTS

The research conducted by McDougal *et al.* (2018) States that the median age at marriage was the same for girls married as minors in both settings (16 years of age). In comparison, the median age of proposal for girls whose early marriages were delayed/canceled was younger in Ethiopia (14 years of age) than India (16 years of age). Decision makers (n = 114) ranged in age from 27 to 39 on average. In both countries, decision-makers for girls whose early marriages were postponed/canceled tended to have higher levels of education than decision-makers for girls who married underage.

In research, it was found that early marriage can occur due to social and structural constraints and stressors. Marriage decision-makers stress that social norms support early marriage, with indicators of marriage readiness based more on signs of puberty or perceptions of emotional maturity than age. Marriage readiness is not determined by age but rather by marriage norms in the area. At first, unmarried women do not think about getting married, but it is environmental factors that make them willing to marry young.

In addition, legal sanctions against early marriage bear less cost than social sanctions against postponed or annulled marriages. Some decision-makers in Ethiopia cited legal restrictions as a reason to prevent or delay early marriage. In Ethiopia, the most commonly mentioned initiators of early marriage proposals are the groom or the groom's family. Meanwhile, in India, girls' extended families are the dominant initiators of early marriage, often expressing concern to parents that girls will be socially stigmatized.

A study by Efevbera *et al.* (2019) Stated that 55% of women married before the age of 18. The percentage of women married before the age of 18 ranges from 19% in Namibia to 80% in Niger, and The average age at marriage for women married as children is 15 compared to 20 for women married as adults. Overall, 18% of the women in the sample were underweight, while 2% were very thin; 22% of women are overweight, and 4% are obese. Conditional on primary education and the fixed effect of educational attainment, women who married before age 18 had a two percent lower chance of being underweight compared to women married at age 18 or older (risk difference = - 0.02, 95% CI [- 0.026, - 0.014], *P*-value <0.01). The estimated associations remained essentially unchanged when we adjusted additionally for childbearing, women's relative status, and socioeconomic outcomes (risk difference = - 0.018, 95% CI [- 0.024, - 0.011], *P*-value < 0.01).

In addition to requirements on primary education and the fixed effects of educational attainment, eight countries in Central, Eastern, and Southern Africa showed a slightly significant association between girl-child marriage and a

**Table 1.** Results of Literature Review

No	Author & Year	Country	Heading	Purpose	Design & Samples	Result
1	McDougal et al. (2018)	Ethiopia, India	Exploring the process of early marriage decision-making using qualitative findings from Ethiopia and India	Chart the path of marriage decision-making and identify the underlying reasons that led to the decision to marry a minor or to postpone or annul early marriage.	Design: Semi-structured interview Sample: Women ages 13–23 who participated in child marriage prevention programs and early marriage or canceled/postponed early marriage and their primary marriage decision makers in Oromia, Ethiopia (n = 105) and Jharkhand, India (n = 100)	Girls with greater social vulnerability, such as those without male caregivers, have more compromising voice, choice, and agency when it comes to early marriage. Understanding early marriage decision-making as a process rather than an endpoint would better complement programs and policies aimed at eliminating early marriage to address the basic norms perpetuating this practice and is a critical lens to support.
2	Efevbera et al. (2019)	Afrika	Girl child marriage, socioeconomic status, and undernutrition: Evidence from 35 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa	The study aimed to find out the extent to which girl child marriage contributes to socioeconomic status and underweight, a measure of malnutrition, among adult women.	Design: Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) Sample: Girl marriage age 14-18 years.	Although associated with a substantial decline in socioeconomic status, girl-child marriage appeared to be associated with a slight reduction in the risk of being underweight in the population studied.
3	Taylor et al. (2019)	Brazil	Child Marriages and Unions in Latin America: Understanding the Roles of Agency and Social Norms	To investigate how factors contributing to a particular practice intersect and interact.	Design: A secondary cross-case analysis of three qualitative studies Sample: three qualitative studies (in Brazil, Guatemala, and Honduras)	Research should advance frameworks for conceptualizing how social norms interact with agencies in nuanced and contextualized ways. Practitioners should encourage fair decision-making, offer confidential and teen-friendly AYSRH services, and address the social norms of parents, men and sons, and members of society.
4	Mpimbi et al. (2022)	Tanzania	Individual and Social Level Factors Influencing Repeated Pregnancy among Unmarried Adolescent Mothers in Katavi Region-Tanzania: A Qualitative Study	The study explored individual and social level factors influencing recurrent pregnancies in unmarried adolescent mothers in the Katavi Region.	Design: exploratory qualitative study Sample: 16 participants	The study establishes individual factors that influence recurrent pregnancies, namely inadequate knowledge of sexuality, perceived barriers of individuals in contraceptive use, and guarantees for marriage. Furthermore, the social factors identified were decision-making power, peer pressure, and parent-child relationships. Inadequate education about sexuality is observed as an important factor influencing recurrent pregnancies. Parents, as primary educators, should be encouraged to talk to their children, especially young women, about sexual education.
5	Schaffnit, Urassa and Lawson, (2019)	Tanzania	Child marriage" in context: exploring local attitudes towards early marriage in rural Tanzania	Investigate local views on marriage.	Design: Exploratory Study (FGD) Sample: 993 women	Our conclusions explain why early marriage rates remain high despite the potential for harmful negative consequences and tightening legislation. We discuss our results in relation to related qualitative studies in other cultural contexts and consider the application of policies to current efforts to restrict early marriage in Tanzania and beyond.

reduced risk of underweight. Similar results were found for models adjusted for birth history, women's relative status, and socioeconomic outcomes, with only Comoros, Gabon, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Tanzania, and Zambia showing marginally significant and negative associations.

Research by Taylor et al. (2019) found that girls exercise agency, within this system of norms, in ways that contribute to their marriage and union. Here, we report on three ways in which social norms and agency of girls intersect in study countries: (1) social norms governing acceptable actions of girls in families of origin contribute to the implementation of

their "oppositional" agency; (2) social norms encourage male dominance and the agency of girls' "accommodation"; and (3) girls run "transformative" agencies to reject harmful social norms, contributing to the development of several new norms that support girls' sexual and reproductive health.

The study also states that girls exercise their agency in conflicting ways that lead to child marriage and unionism. Silenced and stigmatized marriage/child line unions and relationships combined with a lack of information and access to contraception and sexually transmitted infection prevention services all have implications for adolescent and youth

sexual and reproductive health (AYSRH). Unlike the cases of opposition agencies where girls seek distance from family control over their sexuality, girls in Brazil exercise agency accommodation by marrying or joining trade unions for protection. Study participants said that through marriage they sought to achieve one (or more) of the following: avoiding the sale of sex; escaping experiences of sexual and physical abuse in the home household; seeking refuge in the context of high-level urban violence controlled by the state and gangs; and gain material and economic stability.

Research conducted by Mpimbi *et al.* (2022) found that some unmarried adolescents have inadequate knowledge of sexuality because they have never attended seminars or programs related to sexual education and do not have knowledge about family planning. This is evidenced by the results obtained when a study was conducted on 16 unmarried adolescent mothers aged 17-19. In this study, it is known that the education level of respondents consists of elementary school, never school, and dropout at elementary school.

The study also found that unmarried adolescents are at significant risk for recurrent pregnancies due to individual and social factors. In this case, researchers found 6 themes, namely inadequate knowledge of sexuality, barriers that can be felt when using contraception, marriage guarantees, decision-making, peer pressure, and parent-child relationships.

Knowledge of adolescent sexuality affects repeated pregnancies in unmarried adolescents. Among the teenagers thought that she would not get pregnant a second time, and some thought that she did not know how to prevent future pregnancies. In addition to knowledge about sexuality, the barriers individuals feel to contraceptive use are still not understood. Teenagers assume that contraception will interfere with their menstrual cycle. In addition, they also believe that contraception cannot prevent pregnancy.

Marriage problems that arise among teenagers. Some teens reported that they were promised marriage if they accepted having sex with their partner; However, that promise was never fulfilled. In addition, decision-making by adolescents is also a factor in the occurrence of repeated pregnancies. Peer pressure is also a factor in recurrent pregnancies. It is characterized by being lured, accused of being infertile, and fear of being rumored; that is, it can only get pregnant once.

Research by Schaffnit, Urassa, and Lawson (2019). The initial response from the FGD participants was brief and expressed with self-evidence. Many argue that marriage is law – concerning natural law, God's law, and Sukuma's law. The reason for bearing children in couples is to achieve happiness because not being able to have children is seen as a great difficulty experienced in marriage. If one partner is infertile, then conflicts between spouses will occur, and one of the spouses may decide to have children outside the relationship to meet this need. Finally, marriage brings respect and status within one's family and community. Both men's and women's views gain weight in their communities by marrying; their views will be sought in community decision making, and their contributions will be sought in community activities.

The ideal age of marriage is 18 years for women (IQR = 18.20) and 22 years for men (IQR = 20.25). The data states that the majority of women marry at the age of 18 while men are 22 years old. The main factor in marrying girls at the age of 18 is education. If the child does not receive an education, the child will be married. As for men, financial readiness and educational status must be resolved first. So, it can be concluded that marriage can change status, autonomy, and standard of living.

However, marrying "too early" or "too late" has consequences. By remaining unmarried, the authority or maturity of young people is undermined. An unmarried woman may be called a "mischance wa Gunilla" (worthless girl) and cannot gain the respect of her community through other roles. Unmarried men are considered avoidant of responsibility ("You will be considered a pleasure-loving person" [Male, semi-urban]).

## DISCUSSION

Women's education was identified as a strong policy and program factor for determining the incidence of child marriage. Completing secondary or higher education in girls significantly delays the time of marriage. Educated girls are more likely to have decision-making power regarding their choice of spouse and the timing of their marriage than uneducated girls. In addition, girls with higher education find more jobs than girls with less education; Therefore, they tend to marry at an older age. Previous studies have shown that poverty is a major driver of girl-child marriage in developing countries. Evidence has found that girls from the poorest and poorest households are more likely to marry at an early age than girls living in rich and wealthiest households (Phiri *et al.*, 2023).

Poverty forces parents to marry off their daughters at a very early age because the demand for dowry is low for younger girls. In South Asian societies where dowry practices in the form of cash payments are prevalent, there are additional financial incentives for parents to marry off their daughters early so they don't have to pay that much. dowry to the parents of the groom-to-be. Girls are often married off as early as possible to avoid education costs and ease the financial burden of caring for girls. Poverty can, thus, be an important driver of early marriage (Paul, 2019).

In general, early marriage can hinder girls' access to and continuity of education. This is by a broad understanding supported by various studies and organizations, including the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (KemenPPPA) listed in the bibliography. KemenPPPA seeks to advocate for women's rights, including equal and inclusive education, and prevent the practice of early marriage that can hinder the development and education of girls (KemenPPPA, 2022).

Education has an important role to play in preventing early marriage in Latin America. The theory put forward is that education can give girls the knowledge and skills to make better decisions about their future, raise awareness of their rights, and strengthen their ability to resist the pressures and social norms that affect early marriage. With higher education, girls have a greater opportunity to develop independence, hone skills, and build careers that can help them avoid early marriage. Therefore, education can be a protective factor in preventing early marriage (Taylor *et al.*, 2019).

Low levels of education and poverty have a significant impact on the high prevalence of early marriage for girls in India. This theory states that lack of education and conditions of poverty can be factors that exacerbate the risk of early marriage. When access to education is limited and economic conditions are difficult, girls are often forced to marry at a young age to reduce the family's financial burden or because of the restricted life options available to them. Therefore, efforts to improve education and reduce poverty can be essential in reducing the prevalence of early marriage in India (Paul, 2019).

Quality formal education is an essential factor in preventing early marriage. Through education, girls can gain the knowledge, skills, and awareness they need to make

better choices for their future. In addition, inclusive and quality education can also strengthen public understanding of girls' rights, increase knowledge about the risks and negative consequences of early marriage, and encourage more positive attitudes towards education and gender equality. Therefore, interventions that focus on girls' education and empowerment can be an effective strategy for preventing early marriage. (Chae and Ngo, 2017).

Peer education in the context of reproductive health is more than just providing reproductive health information. The impact of peer education on knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors related to reproductive health, including marriage issues. Peer education interventions can influence knowledge and attitudes about early marriage. Peer education in the context of reproductive health has a broader impact than just providing reproductive health information. Peer education groups consist of adolescents trained as peer educators able to disseminate reproductive health information to their peers (Mangombe et al., 2020).

Peer education also significantly influences knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors related to reproductive health. Teens who get peer education tend to have a better understanding of the risks of early marriage and have more positive attitudes toward marriage delay. In addition, they are also more likely to use contraception and go to reproductive health services. This research shows that peer education in the context of reproductive health can be an effective strategy to inform adolescents about the risks of early marriage and encourage healthy attitudes and behaviors related to reproductive health (Mehra et al., 2018; Mulalu et al., 2023).

With these interventions, almost all studies suggest that education is one of the factors influencing the occurrence of early marriage among adolescents. With education, the information received by adolescents will be more complex. The addition of this information is one way that can be chosen to prevent and also as an effort to reduce the number of early marriages among adolescents. Teenagers who have information about the risks of early marriage will be wiser in making decisions related to marriage.

## CONCLUSION

Peer education in the context of reproductive health has a significant impact on knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors related to the prevention of child marriage. Teens who get peer education tend to have better knowledge of the risks of early marriage and have more positive attitudes toward marriage delay. Peer education interventions can influence knowledge and attitudes about early marriage, as well as encourage more positive attitudes towards education and gender equality.

Thus, it can be concluded that peer information has an important role in improving the knowledge, attitudes, and behavior of adolescents related to the prevention of child marriage. Peer education efforts can be an effective strategy in combating child marriage and promoting awareness of the importance of education, gender equality, and reproductive health among adolescents. The hope is to provide education through peers for adolescents regarding the risk of child marriage so that they will be able to determine the steps that must be taken so that the rate of child marriage decreases.

## Declaration of Interest

The author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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## Data Availability

The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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