

The role of kyai leadership in preventing child marriage tradition to strengthen human resources in Madura

Dwi Astutiek¹, Sukei Sukei²

Universitas Sunan Giri Surabaya, Jawa Timur, Indonesia¹

Universitas Dr. Soetomo, Jawa Timur, Indonesia²

dwiastuti@unsuri.ac.id¹, sukei@unitomo.ac.id²



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Abstract

Purpose: Elaborating the leadership role of the kyai. Finding solutions to prevent the tradition of child marriage as an effort to strengthen human resources in Madura through an approach based on government policies and traditional practices in the community.

Methodology: Using a descriptive qualitative approach, in-depth interviews with informants and key informants. Using an interview guide. Primary data was collected through in-depth interviews. Data were enriched with observation and review of relevant literature.

Results: 1) Public policies are implemented in a structured, systematic and massive manner. 2) The implementation of the policy encountered several obstacles and obstacles related to the tradition of child marriage which is rooted because it is carried out for generations, 3) The role of kyai has the power to help overcome child marriage strategically and systematically, as an effort to help strengthen human resources in Madura. Kyai is very open, willing and easy to accept new knowledge related to the physical and psychological health impacts of child marriage.

Conclusions: Kyai is a role model-teacher figure for Madurese people who should be obeyed and followed. The role of kyai leadership is a potential that can answer problems in Madura as an effort to strengthen human resources by not marrying off their children at an early age. Although the tradition of child marriage in Madura is very rooted.

Limitations: This research is limited to providing awareness, solutions and proposals for strategic steps that must be taken for structural clerics, cultural clerics, communities and policy makers. Further research is needed regarding the application and evaluation of the implementation of the NU/MUI fatwa in preventing child marriage.

Contribution: Contributing to the scientific field for scientists, policy makers, religious leaders and the community: realizing the leadership role of kyai, providing solutions to prevent child marriage. Kyai's fatwa can save the fate of the nation's children, provide access to higher education. This research is the basis for making policies and the next strategic steps.

Keywords: *Child Marriage Tradition, Public Policy, Role of Kyai Leadership, Strengthening Human Resources*

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1. Introduction

Child marriage in Indonesia is a highly complex issue encompassing social, cultural, and legal dimensions. This situation continues to be a cause for concern due to the persistently high number of child marriages, with 52,095 cases reported in 2022 based on marriage dispensation cases (source: Directorate General of Religious Courts). This contradicts the spirit of gender equality and conflicts with programs aimed at protecting mothers and children and improving the quality of life for society in preparing an outstanding generation for Indonesia's golden age in 2045. The government, through its policies in the field of education, the Ministry of National Development Planning (PPN), or the National Development Planning Agency (BAPPENAS), has launched the Education Roadmap 2025-2045, which includes the 13-year compulsory education program. This is a commitment by the Minister of Education and Culture to accelerate the 13-year compulsory education program from preschool to 12th grade. This planning is part of a strategy to prevent child marriage, with the primary goal of enlightening the nation and developing the Indonesian people as a whole. This plan aligns with the latest Marriage Law No. 16 of 2019.

Under the Marriage Law No. 16 of 2019, the minimum age for marriage is set at 19 years. However, in reality, many marriage dispensations are still granted by religious courts based on cultural and economic reasons, lack of public awareness, and the absence of effective oversight in the implementation of the law (Az-Zahra & Budiono, 2025). Child marriage has become a deeply ingrained tradition, particularly in rural areas, including East Java, which, by the way, has a highly diverse geography encompassing urban areas, predominantly rural regions, mountains, coastlines, islands, outlying areas, remote regions, and the farthest reaches across its 38 regencies and cities. Regionally, the highest number of cases based on marriage dispensation requests is in East Java, with 15,339 cases decided by Religious Courts, accounting for 29.44% of national cases (Hernawan & Widigdo, 2023).

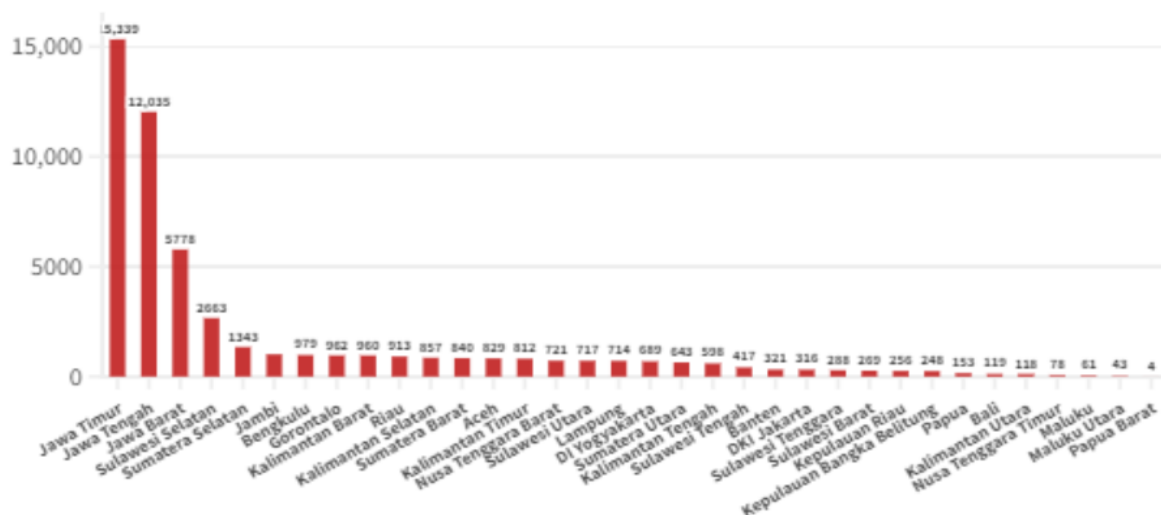


Figure 1. Number of Marriage Dispensation Applicants in Indonesia 2022
Source: Directorate General of Religious Courts

Marrying off children is a very strong tradition in East Java, with 15,399 being the number of marriage dispensation requests decided upon by the Religious Court. It is likely that many couples have entered into secret marriages without applying for a marriage dispensation and have not been detected by the KUA. The marriage dispensation regulation is intended to accommodate special circumstances, such as pregnancy outside of marriage or other emergency situations. However, the existence of this marriage dispensation regulation is subject to cultural bias, which risks forcing children into adulthood at a young age through child marriage. This situation leads to the approval of marriage dispensation requests that ultimately harm girls, affecting the very foundation of their lives and futures. This condition highlights the weakness of the social and cultural system in fulfilling children's rights (Fajriyah, Marhamah, & Anggriani, 2023).

A solution to the issue of child marriage is needed to address the root of the problem. Given the tradition of marrying children at school age in East Java, particularly in rural areas with strong traditional cultural influences. As stated by Rofika and Hariastuti (2020), the factors influencing child marriage in Sumenep are cultural, namely the efforts of parents to arrange marriages, with the rationale of preserving the family lineage and continuing the tradition. To ensure that these marriages take place, practices such as sorcery and age manipulation are considered legal by the community. This is due to the strong belief in religious leaders (Kyai). When a child experiences possession, they are married off to prevent further possession.

Child marriage also occurs in Pamekasan due to the involvement of religious leaders or community figures known as kyai, including marriage ceremonies with the consent of both parties, whether formal or informal marriages (nikah sirri). These marriages are predominantly based on the wishes of the parents, with some even being arranged in childhood. Child marriage is common in rural communities. The trust and submission of parents to religious leaders or ulama in Madura are much higher than to government officials with authority, such as those in the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA). In fact, there is often a shift in roles between the marriage officiant and the religious or community leader, especially when the KUA rejects a marriage on the grounds that the couple is not of legal age. Parents then directly ask the religious or community leader to marry their children through a secret marriage (Supraptiningsih & Hariyanto, 2019).

This phenomenon is important to analyze as it reveals the tension between national legal norms and social norms prevailing in society. Currently, kyai play a role in child marriage decisions by assisting in finding suitable partners. This issue can be formulated as follows: How does the tradition of child marriage continue despite clear public policies to the contrary? How can the role of kyai be a solution in addressing child marriage as an effort to strengthen human resources in Madura, given that kyai are considered cultural brokers contributing to child marriage?

East Java has two major ethnic groups: Javanese and Madurese. This study focuses on the Madurese ethnic group, specifically in Bangkalan, Sampang, Pamekasan, and Sumenep. Madura was chosen as the research location because of its unique cultural practices related to child marriage and a relatively high child marriage rate. Even secret marriages have become a primary focus in the implementation of child marriage. This research in Madura is expected to serve as a representative reference, as child marriage rates remain high in several other districts and cities in East Java, particularly in the Tapal Kuda region of Madura. Among the Tapal Kuda region are Probolinggo, Lumajang, Bondowoso, Banyuwangi, Situbondo, Jember, and Pasuruan, which share similar cultural practices. The majority of the population in the Tapal Kuda region are Pandalungan people of Javanese and Madurese ethnicity (Arrovia, 2021).

This study aimed to outline the role of kyai leadership. It seeks solutions to prevent the tradition of child marriage as an effort to strengthen human resources in Madura through an approach based on government policies and traditional community practices. Seeking solutions by leveraging the potential of kyai as public figures and role models for students, congregants, or the community to issue fatwas, sermons, advice, and similar guidance, at least within pesantren and their communities, to prevent child marriages. This study aims to counter the findings of Islamiyah (2024) by presenting an alternative perspective in seeking solutions. Bases her article on Weber's theory of authority, stating that kyai can influence the community through their stability, power, and ability to preach, applying religious practices, thereby softly ensuring compliance with the kyai's guidance, thereby narrowing the space for rejection of the kyai's invitation to engage in the siri marriage practices.

This study hypothesizes that the involvement of religious leaders in the implementation of public policy can increase the effectiveness of preventing child marriage. The leadership role of religious leaders is assumed to provide solutions for preventing child marriage practices through fatwas, sermons, or advice. The role of religious leaders in preventing child marriage can contribute to strengthening human resources in Madura by providing access to education up to the high school level. Raising the marriage age impacts the health of prospective mothers and their children. Raising the marriage age means

maturing the way of thinking and independence of prospective parents. Therefore, it is assumed that the involvement of kyai in preventing child marriage can help improve the quality of life and potential of children as human resources in Madura, Indonesia.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Public Policy Theory

To address the issue of child marriage in this article, it is necessary to begin with the accompanying public policy. Public policy in the field of public administration is theoretically defined as actions taken by the government in response to issues that arise in society. Additionally, public policy is developed in relation to the government's future-oriented aspects, aiming to achieve the development goals outlined in the government's vision and mission, as noted by Nurmitae and Taufiqurokhman (2024). Regardless of its form, public policy serves as a legal basis for government action.

In multicultural societies, culture plays a significant role in shaping diverse perspectives, preferences, and community needs. This directly impacts public policies formulated by the government. How does local culture influence public policy, and what factors contribute to policy formulation? Nurmitae and Taufiqurokhman (2024) found in their research that a strong local culture can influence the direction of policy, even though other factors also play a role. Their work suggests the importance of policies adapting to local culture to achieve effective and socially accepted outcomes. The government, in managing administration, manages human resources through administrative rules and regulations. In essence, government policies are created and presented for the welfare of Indonesian people.

2.2. The Theory of Cultural Strength

Tradition or culture becomes a mindset and a pattern of action in the lives of every human being (Teguh, Koesbardiati, Ida, Puspa, & Syafarani, 2023). Culture has long been considered a legacy of symbolic behavior according to Roger M. Keesing (1974, p.73). Culture becomes a system of ideas, including religion, ceremonies, and worldviews, referred to as ideational culture. Traditions or culture become a force in each region because they are believed to provide benefits in life, including the manifestation of ideational culture in the issue of early marriage (Keesing 1974, 77). The culture of a society consists of what is known and believed by individuals to be done in a way that is acceptable to its members, in the form of practices, knowledge, skills, expressions, and representations recognized by a group or individuals. Culture is practiced continuously and passed down from generation to generation because it is believed to provide benefits in understanding the world and giving identity to its practitioners (Sam, 2019).

Culture is a construct that encompasses the entirety of beliefs, behaviors, knowledge, sanctions, values, and goals that constitute the way of life for each individual (Sani & Parawita, 2023). Culture is viewed as an inclusive concept in the form of an objective description in the analysis of the thoughts, behaviors, and habits of individuals or groups. Melville Jean Herskovits in Prayogi and Danial (2016) states that culture has four basic elements, including family, technological tools, economic systems, and political power. From the perspective of Family, Burgess in the book *Sociology of the Family* by Soemanto R.B. (2009, p7) mentions that the family embodies certain habits and cultures inherited from societal culture, and the family often practices them in specific forms. Families play an important role in shaping the culture of individuals. Like beliefs, perspectives, habits, to moral values adhered to, interests, and even goals to be achieved. A strong and deeply rooted culture in the family becomes a habit that is routinely practiced and passed down through generations to achieve the desired goals.

2.3. Role Theory

Role is defined as social expectation. Role theory focuses on what individuals are expected to do in society. Roles are based on expectations outlined in the rules or norms. Norms are like the script in a drama played by actors. Individuals in real life are the actors playing these roles, and the stage of the drama is the group or society. The influence of roles, role theory implies that if an analyst has information about role expectations for a particular position, they can accurately predict the behavior of the person occupying that position. Role theory states that a person's role is determined not only by

behavior but also by beliefs and attitudes. A change in role results in a change in attitude (Qian et al., 2018).

Roles encompass three aspects: 1) roles that include the standard position of a person in society, meaning a series of regulations that guide an individual in social life, 2) roles as a concept of what an individual does in an organized society, 3) roles as an individual's behavior within the social structure, Soekanto, S. (1996, p 269). Hasan et al. (2008, p. 24) identified four main objectives of roles: 1) Instrumental goals, which means that by playing a role, there will be opportunities to achieve other goals; 2) Recognition goals, which are generalized by this role to gain opportunities for appreciation; 3) Security, which means providing a sense of security economically, socially, or psychologically; 4) Response, which involves responses to form satisfying social relationships and the assurance of continuity in those responses. Leadership is the ability to influence, motivate, and direct others to achieve desired or shared goals. In this study, leadership refers to 1) providing good examples and role models, 2) inspiring and motivating the community, 3) making the right and wise decisions, 4) directing and guiding the community, and 5) building trust and credibility.

2.4. Human Resource Theory

The Human Resource Theory (SDM) in Strengthening Human Resources uses the Human Capital theory, which emphasizes investing in human resources to improve productivity and quality of life. Becker, G. S. in Human Capital: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis that education and work experience increase individual productivity, which ultimately contributes to economic growth. In the context of Becker's statement, strengthening human resources means improving the education, knowledge, understanding, abilities, skills, and quality of life of individuals or communities so that they can contribute more effectively and productively to development (Becker 2016). In the context of this study, preventing child marriage can be considered an investment effort to prepare human resources to improve the quality of life and productivity of the Madurese community through education up to the high school level.

3. Methodology

The research method used in this study is a qualitative approach, which aims to explain the research object and problems in as much detail as possible, based on facts obtained in the field. Qualitative research generates information from informants and observed written words, allowing the researcher to uncover the underlying meaning of the study (Padmayoni, Widanti, & Dewi, 2025). This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach, maximizing in-depth interviews with informants and key informants to gather data. In-depth interviews were conducted using a pre-prepared interview guide. Primary data were obtained from in-depth interviews, assisted by note-taking and data recording tools. Observations and literature reviews complemented the writing of this article.

4. Result and Discussion

Madura, where the majority of the indigenous population is Muslim, is home to numerous Islamic boarding schools and madrasah schools. Madura has a very strong tradition, one of which is marrying children at a young age. The following data are from the Ministry of Religion's SIMKAH system for 2024.

Table 1. Number of marriages among women aged <19years

No.	Distrit	Age of Female Brides <19 Years Olde	Total Amount
1.	Bangkalan	87	7.686
2.	Sampang	79	6.747
3.	Pamengkasan	156	5.629
4.	Sumenep	331	7.438

Source: SIMKAH data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2024

The data above shows that Madura (Bangkalan, Sampang, Pamekasan, and Sumenep) still has a significant number of brides under the age of 19. These figures are recorded by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, but the number of unregistered marriages in Madura may be even higher.

Table 2. Number of marriages among men aged 19-25

No.	District	Age of Female Brides <19 Years Old	Age of Male Catin 19-25 years old	Total Number of Marriages
1.	Bangkalan	7	3.395	7.687
2.	Sampang	7	3.554	6.747
3.	Pamengkasan	12	2.599	6.629
4.	Sumenep	84	3.627	7.438

Source: SIMKAH data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2024

The same data above shows that Madura (Bangkalan, Sampang, Pamekasan, and Sumenep) still has a significant number of male brides under the age of 19. This figure, recorded by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, may not include the number of unregistered marriages in Madura, which could be even higher.

4.1. Child Marriage and its Negative Impacts

The results of Meilinda (2024) show that child marriage has negative impacts on both the individuals involved and society at large, including reproductive health, interrupted education, and a cycle of persistent poverty. Djamilah and Kartikawati (2014) found that child marriage causes children to drop out of school, instability in family formation, domestic violence (DV), potential infidelity or divorce, and female subordination. These impacts are summarized based on economic effects, leading to a new “cycle of poverty,” as well as social, health, and psychological impacts resulting from violence, infidelity, and divorce. Mentally unprepared individuals may experience trauma, even leading to death, particularly among adolescent girls who marry.

Indriani (2023) identified proxy determinants of maternal mortality rates and infant mortality rates (AKI and AKB/AKBa) that point to specific health indicators and characteristics concentrated among younger age groups (children and adolescents). The University of Indonesia's Women and Gender Study (2015) found that child marriage contributes significantly to public health issues, including high maternal mortality and infant mortality rates (AKI and AKB) (Putra, 2015). According to the BP2D Prpv Jabar Study, the detailed risks of child marriage are: 1. During pregnancy, some women experience chronic energy deficiency (CED), 2. The uterus of adolescent girls is not yet ready, and their reproductive organs are not fully developed [3]. If the mother's health is not properly monitored during pregnancy, the child may experience stunting [4]. Mentally and psychologically, they are not ready to be spouses, let alone parents [5]. Young mothers lack the ability to care for their children, 6. Economic issues. The income of young husbands is insufficient to meet family needs [7]. Increased risk of divorce and 8. Increased risk of domestic violence (DV).

In general, the risks of child marriage include the creation of new poverty, increased divorce rates, increased stunting rates, increased maternal and child mortality rates, and children dropping out of school before completing the mandatory 13 years of education. Additionally, the reproductive organs of children are not yet fully developed, family economics are not yet self-sufficient, children's psychological effects are still unstable, and the potential for conflict and disharmony within the household is quite high.

4.2. Public Policy Strategies in Preventing Child Marriage

The negative impact of child marriage is an important consideration in preparing strategic measures for the government of East Java. Based on the enactment of Marriage Law No. 16 of 2019 and the existence of East Java Regional Regulation No. 16 of 2012 concerning the Protection of Women and Children Victims of Violence, this was followed up with East Java Governor Circular Letter No. 474. 14/810/109.5/2021, on the Prevention of Child Marriage. The East Java Provincial Government also issued the Governor of East Java Circular Letter No. 300/145.1/109.4/2022 on handling issues related to women, children, and families. East Java Governor Regulation No. 01 of 2021 on the nomenclature

of the organizational structure, job descriptions, and functions, as well as the work procedures of the Technical Implementation Unit of the East Java Provincial DP3AK, and East Java Governor Regulation No. 20 of 2021 on the Implementation Regulations of the East Java Regional Regulation are also used.

The strategic steps taken by the East Java Provincial Government include signing a commitment in Madiun on July 29, 2022, titled "Prevent Stunting and Achieve Quality Families." The Governor of East Java launched the 5 Stop Movement, namely 1) Stop Stunting, 2) Stop Lack of Population Documents, 3) Stop Bullying and Violence Against Women and Children, 4) Stop Child Labor, and 5) Stop Child Marriage. The creation of the Integrity Pact for the Prevention of Child Marriage in East Java Province involved several stakeholders, including 1) the East Java Provincial Legislative Council, 2) the Surabaya High Religious Court, 3) the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia in East Java Province, 4) the Representative Office of the National Population and Family Planning Agency in East Java Province, 5) the Department of Women's Empowerment, Child Protection, and Population in East Java Province, 6) the Family Planning, Women's Empowerment, and Child Protection Department of Gresik Regency, 7) the Indonesian Ulema Council of East Java Province, 8) the East Java Province PKK Movement Team, 9) the East Java Province DPD Association of All Indonesian Villages, and acknowledged by the Governor of East Java on April 6, 2021, in Surabaya (DP3AK East Java (Province, 2022).

The policy's implementation involves counseling on the maturation of the marriage age for children at the sub-district level by field counselors. This provincial government activity is synergized with the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia in East Java. The activity is complemented by marriage counseling conducted by the Ministry of Religion and its Religious Affairs Office (KUA), as well as tightening the process of handling marriage dispensations. East Java Governor Regulation No. 85 of 2023 establishes the Regional Action Plan (RAD) for the Prevention and Handling of Child Marriage for the years 2023-2024, signed on December 5, 2024. The RAD serves as the foundation for local governments, communities, parents, and children in East Java to achieve the goal of preventing child marriage. The East Java Provincial Government, through the DP3AK, continues to encourage the immediate development of RADs in each district and city. Anwar (2024) to accelerate the reduction in child marriage rates, the PPA Dashboard (SIAPA PEKA) was launched in May as a tool for data transparency, encouraging multi-stakeholders to be sensitive and committed to collaborating on child marriage prevention programs.

The implementation of policies in strategic steps is complemented by collaboration with partner organizations, namely community organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Muhammadiyah, Muslimat, Aisyiyah, and PKK. However, the question is whether this has been implemented maximally, as this has not yet been evaluated. Supporting and hindering factors in the implementation of policies to prevent child marriage in Madura Based on the results of the focus group discussion among participants, religious leaders, and community leaders from religious organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, Muslimat, Aisyiyah, the Indonesian Mosque Council (DMI), the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), and relevant government agencies across Madura, the supporting factors for the child marriage policy are: 1) the existence of follow-up support from the provincial and district or city governments in the form of regional regulations, circular letters, or other measures; 2) the availability of technical equipment for relevant government agencies, including the Department of Women's Empowerment, Child Protection, Population Control, and Family Planning (DP3AKB), the Ministry of Religion, the KUA, and village officials; and 3) support from partner organizations.

The obstacles to the implementation of child marriage prevention are: 1) low levels of education among the community, 2) a lack of understanding among the community about the dangers of child marriage, 3) the influence of digitalization, information, and globalization, 4) the practice of early marriage is still carried out as a tradition and belief that influences "taboos, fear of not being able to marry, anomalies, preserving lineage, wanting to hold grandchildren or great-grandchildren soon, or being proud to accompany one's grandchildren or great-grandchildren in marriage, and so on" 5) economic reasons, such as wanting to quickly transfer parental responsibilities to the person who marries their child and wanting to quickly receive a dowry, and 6) Kyai as role models and places to seek guidance and prayers,

while still having incomplete understanding of the impacts of child marriage. Kyai understand that they have an obligation to hasten marriage; if asked for help, they must assist, including in matters of finding a spouse, officiating the marriage, and even acting as a guardian or judge.

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4.4. Supporting and hindering factors in the implementation of policies to prevent child marriage in Madura.

Based on the results of the focus group discussion among participants, religious leaders, and community leaders from religious organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, Muslimat, Aisiyah, the Indonesian Mosque Council (DMI), the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), and relevant government

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4.5. Public Policy and the Strength of Tradition/Culture of Child Marriage in East Java

Public policy does not operate in isolation. In multicultural societies, culture plays a significant role in shaping the perspectives, preferences, and needs of diverse communities. This directly impacts public policies formulated by the government. How does local culture influence public policy, and what factors contribute to the policymaking process?. Nurmitae and Taufiqurokhman (2024) found in their research that a strong local culture can influence the direction of policy, although other factors also play a role. Their work suggests the importance of policies adapting to local culture to achieve effective and socially accepted outcomes.

Child marriage is a social phenomenon that is easily influenced by deeply rooted cultural norms, as noted by Rofika and Hariastuti (2020). Child marriage has become a custom or cultural practice, for example, in Madura, including in Pamekasan, because there is still the belief that an unmarried girl is taboo, shameful, and considered undesirable. Arranged marriages are still prevalent and have become a cultural norm in rural areas, where children who have graduated from elementary school are often sent to Islamic boarding schools to wait for a suitable match. Arranged marriages are even conducted when children are very young (Supraptiningsih & Hariyanto, 2019).

Traditions and social norms play a significant role in the implementation of child marriage. As stated by Meilinda (2024) her research findings indicate that strong traditions and social norms are one of the primary factors driving the practice of child marriage. Traditions are often rooted in cultural values that consider that women must marry early to preserve family honor as a way to reduce family problems, particularly economic burdens. Social pressure forces families to marry off their daughters despite being aware of the consequences of such marriages.

There is a conflict between the tradition of child marriage and public policies established by the government. Marriage Law No. 16 of 2019 was enacted based on health considerations, namely the physical unpreparedness of pregnant mothers and the psychological unpreparedness of young families. This aims to avoid new problems such as divorce, as both parties are not yet ready, especially since the child's age is still prone to playing with an unstable ego. Additionally, educational considerations aim to extend compulsory schooling to 13 years to break the cycle of persistent poverty caused by child marriages. Child marriage contributes to school dropout rates in India. The duration of schooling serves as an indicator of human resource quality, as higher education enhances the abilities, skills, and independence of young people as they become future parents. Although progressive in setting the minimum marriage age, Marriage Law No. 16 of 2019 remains weak due to loopholes in its implementation. Marriage dispensations have become a “loophole” for communities that continue to

uphold the tradition of child marriages. Despite being aware of its negative impacts, this practice creates new challenges for the family's future.

4.6. Strengthening Human Resource

Strengthening human resources is the most important part of building a state and a social system. Support from various parties, including parents, institutions, the community, and the government, is a harmonious collaboration that is hoped to be realized in the future. However, the government's efforts are often not as easy as expected. The existence of customs, traditions, and culture can be one of the challenges in realizing the spirit of developing human resources in Indonesia, especially in Madura, which is deeply rooted in the tradition of arranging marriages and marrying off children at a young age.

Results of the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and in-depth interviews at Hotel Azana Pamekasan with religious leaders representing PC NU throughout Madura, Muhammadiyah across Madura, Muslimat NU across Madura, Aisyiyah across Madura, the Madura Mosque Council, and relevant Local Government Support Organizations (OPD) across Madura, with the theme of Preventing Child Marriage at the Azana Style Hotel in Pamekasan on September 11-12, 2024:

“Child marriage in Madura is typically arranged at a young age, first through arranged marriages with family members or relatives to preserve lineage and clan continuity within the context of kinship and family identity, she said. Second, through the practice of entrusting daughters to religious leaders (kyai) to be placed in Islamic boarding schools while awaiting a suitable match. Children are at the level of completing elementary school. Understanding and awareness of children's rights are still lacking, so child marriages continue to occur. Prevention must come from parents as members of society who have traditions and understanding, and from religious leaders as public figures who are respected and followed by their congregations.”

Preventing child marriage can help improve the quality of life of children and empower them to achieve their life goals and aspirations. Strengthening human resources through the prevention of child marriage can help improve children's skills and knowledge. Strengthening human resources can help increase children's opportunities to receive an education, achieve their life goals, and improve their families' quality of life. Strengthening human resources in Madura through the prevention of child marriage means: 1) encouraging and providing access to education or continuing schooling; 2) improving the quality of education and health; 3) increasing community awareness and principles of life; 4) improving economic capacity and productivity; and 5) improving the quality of life and welfare of the community.

The results of the Focus Group Discussion on the action plan were decided to be quite varied across the four districts present, but they remained within the context of building internal organizational cohesion and harmonizing the various elements present, including the following:

- a. Providing regular education to the community through Muslim women's or men's study groups to encourage parents to motivate their children to pursue compulsory education for 13 years.
- b. In addition to formal schooling, there is a need to strengthen children's human resources through skill-based education that aligns with their interests and abilities.
- c. Ensuring other rights, such as the right to care, play, and joy, in accordance with their age-appropriate needs.
- d. Preventing vulnerable children from living without their families.

Finally, in the FGD, all religious organizations, community organizations, and Local Government Support Organizations (OPD) present agreed to build a commitment to prevent child marriage in their respective regions, guided by the Action Plan developed jointly by each district. Thus, strengthening human resources can help the Madura community become strong, independent, and prosperous.

4.7. The Perspective of Kyai's Role in Addressing Child Marriage

In role theory, role expectations are contained. Role expectations are societal concepts regarding what an individual will do. A change in role results in a change in attitude. This is what is expected from a revered kyai for his followers, namely, a trusted person. Individuals play their roles and align their

appearances with norms; in other words, individuals will be conformist (following rules) trying to meet the expectations of others. According to Jannah (2015), a kyai is not only a leader of religious rituals but also a place to pour out various problems and grievances in facing the daily issues of the community. In rural areas, kyais are usually asked to provide solutions to the problems faced by the community, whether they are family issues, education, matchmaking, and determining the timing for weddings and jobs. The term kyai is based in the traditional, salaf, and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) pesantren world.

According to Horikosi (1987, p. 242), kyai as agents of social change operate within the cultural sphere. Kyai is placed as a custodian of the system, not a creator of the system, and as an intermediary (broker) in connecting modern society with traditional defense systems. Kyai as a benchmark of vigilance in the principle of authority, when there is a decline in any aspect, it is the kyai who becomes the pacifier. This statement is supported by the writing of Islamiyah (2024), who states that kyai have been considered brokers contributing to the high rate of child marriages. In the practice of secret marriages, the involvement of kyai is formed by the power or authority of the kyai as a marriage broker, officiant, and consultant for secret marriages. Kyai are also relied upon to address marriage obstacles, with cases of buying guardianship or the practice of wali muhakam being found. Through Weber's theory of authority, the kyai's power can gently attract the sympathy of the community. Kyai has advantages in moral and spiritual aspects and consistently practices religious duties and preaching, so the community consciously shows obedience to the kyai and reduces the space for rejection. Child marriage is heavily influenced by traditions based on the customs or culture and social norms prevailing in a particular place, and kyai are considered and play the role of custodians of the traditional defense system and are expected to meet the community's expectations.

In this study, the perspective on the role of kyai is reversed, namely by making changes and strengthening the role of kyai into a strategic opportunity to address the issue of child marriage. It is hoped that this will lead to a change in societal attitudes through the knowledge, understanding, and teachings conveyed by the kyai. Based on this interest, the transformation of knowledge related to the 'impact of child marriage' must be carried out so that there is an understanding among both structural and cultural kyai in preparing and leaving behind a quality generation for the welfare of the community. This is in line with one of the recommendations from Djamilah and Kartikawati's (2014) research to address marriage, which is the strengthening of the roles of cultural and religious leaders. However, in the research by Djamilah and Kartikawati (2014), it has not been explained in detail what is meant by strengthening the role of kyai and the technical strategies of the kyai's role in preventing child marriage.

Structural kyai are part of the Nahdlatul Ulama organizational structure. Structural kyai must understand the impact of child marriage because they are expected to socialize and provide knowledge and fatwas to the organization's administrators down to the branch level and its members. Cultural kyai are those who own pesantren, regularly conduct preaching, and are trusted and recognized in their regions. These cultural kyai are expected to address the topic of the impact of child marriage in their sermons, and if asked to find a match for someone, they should provide appropriate guidance on the importance of leaving behind a quality generation by not marrying children at a young age. To initiate the movement to prevent child marriage through structural kyai, it should be implemented at the provincial level, namely East Java, which is accessible. Here is an interview with KH Abd Matin Djawahir, a structural kyai and deputy Rois Syuriah of the East Java NU Regional Board, which oversees 38 regencies and cities in East Java or 45 NU Branch Managers in East Java, founder, and caretaker of the Sunan Bejagung Islamic Boarding School located in Bejagung - Semanding - Tuban, regarding the impact of child marriage and stunting.

His response when met at the Sunan Bejagung boarding school along with the medical team from the local Puskesmas and DP3AK was, "Wow, this is very important to convey to the community so that child marriages do not happen again, because not everyone knows the bad impacts. A special discussion is needed at the East Java level regarding this issue. In the next step, socialization should continue to the branch management level, down to the sub-branch. The branch committee refers to the lowest level of management / grassroots, which includes villages, mosques, or prayer rooms."

The results of the meeting with the structural kyai representative of PW NU East Java at his pesantren showed that the kyai was very caring, welcoming, and willing to receive information and input from the community health center medical staff and psychologists regarding the impact of child marriage. This is not like their (the health center officers') previous concerns, who thought that the kyai would be very difficult to meet and might be resistant to accepting new knowledge or information regarding the impacts of child marriage. Interviews with health center officers and the Women's Empowerment, Child Protection, and Family Welfare Office (DP3AKB) of Bangkalan and Sampang regarding the challenges of building partnerships with NU or kyai, both structural and cultural:

"We want to collaborate with clerics who have Islamic boarding schools to address child marriage, but we find it difficult to start. Are our presence and information accepted?" It's as if there is a huge wall preventing us from meeting a cleric." The concerns were unfounded after a mediator strategy was implemented through Muslimat administrators or bu nyai, making communication with the kyai easy to accept. The kyai were very welcoming in receiving the information as a mission for the welfare of their community. Madura, as one of the tribes that still strongly practices child marriage, is therefore very suitable as the locus of this study. In addition, the presence of kyai in Madura is very significant because they serve as role models, and for all forms of problems, including arranged marriages for children, the Madurese community consults them. The kyai's role is very strategic. When asked who is worthy of being obeyed in following the life principles of the Madurese people, one informant with the initials S stated that:

"There is a saying that embodies the value of obedience: 'buppa', babu, Guru, ratoh'. It means that a person is considered good if they are obedient to their parents, namely father and mother, obedient to their teacher, namely Kyai, and obedient to the ratoh or king as the leader/ruler, in this case, the regent as the head of the region."

This expression, as a system, automatically shows respect and appreciation to biological parents, teachers/kyai as spiritual parents, and formal leaders, which is implemented in a structured and strong manner as a socio-political system in Madurese society. Everything related to children, whatever the parents say, the children must obey. If parents encounter problems and are unable to resolve them, the last resort is to consult a kyai, who is considered a teacher capable of providing advice and guidance for the future, both in this world and the hereafter. This shows that the final decision point for the life choices of the Madurese people, both in this world and the hereafter, lies in the advice, counsel, or fatwa of their teacher/kyai (Astutiek, Mashud, & Suyanto, 2017). Obedience holds sacred value, especially when it occurs in social activities related to local community traditions. Obedience to teachers and parents is not only viewed as a customary value but also as the highest moral standard, a measure of goodness, politeness, and courtesy (Hannan & Abdillah, 2019).

Obedience to this kyai is an opportunity and is very strategic if used maximally to prevent child marriage. From the perspective of social facts, a kyai as a leader who is essentially a religious figure is actually a charismatic leader centered on personal leadership. The competence of a kyai places them as a sacred authority in religion. Fatwas and advice from the kyai are made into social-political preferences that are followed by their followers. Kyai, with the authority of power and morality that he possesses, is able to mobilize the community to make life choices. The role of kyai leadership in this research includes the following: 1) Spiritual leader: a kyai as a spiritual leader can influence the community through religious teachings and moral values. 2) Community Leader: A kyai can lead and mobilize the community to achieve common goals, such as preventing child marriages. 3) Educator: A kyai can provide education and counseling to the community about the importance of education for their children and convey children's rights. 4) Decision-maker: The kyai can make appropriate and wise decisions in addressing the problems faced by the community. 5) Role model: The kyai sets a good example and becomes a role model for his community. In the context of preventing child marriage, the leadership role of a kyai can change the mindset and behavior of the community and raise awareness about the importance of education and children's rights.

Kyai leadership as a religious figure in society plays a key role as a social mover, meaning that they drive the community to make life choices. This includes determining attitudes related to decisions about marriage age and the future of their children, a generation of quality, independent, and commendable individuals. Strategies to strengthen the role of religious leaders in preventing child marriage can take initial steps in accordance with the roles, character, and culture that underlie these leaders' positions:

1. Identifying the type of kyai, whether structural or cultural, to facilitate The steps that will be taken
2. It is necessary to conduct a review or study of issues such as bahtsul masail related to child marriage from the perspectives of Islam, culture and health. The results of the bahtsul masail become a fatwa that must be used as a guideline for the congregation and community. The organizers of the bahtsul masail can be MUI or NU, the largest organizations in Indonesia.
3. If there is already a bahtsul masail, to what extent are the results of the bahtsul masail socially disseminated structurally by religious and community organizations, whether NU or others? To what extent is it implemented and adhered to by the community or its congregation?
4. The fatwa's socialization results in an understanding of the negative impacts of child marriage and what should be done in accordance with applicable national legal norms.
5. For all structural kyai or bu nyai, the MUI/NU fatwa is disseminated to organizations down to the grassroots level, namely the branch children (village level).
6. As for the cultural kyai/bu nyai, they receive socialization from the structural kyai to be conveyed to their congregation or community members.

Public policies to prevent child marriage and the role of kyai leadership in strengthening human resources can be implemented through several means, including: 1) creating derivatives of marriage laws; 2) educating and outreaching to the community about the dangers of child marriage; 3) involving kyais and community leaders in socializing policies and educating about child marriage; 4) developing educational and skills training programs to raise awareness and improve community capabilities; 5) collaborating between the government, religious community organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama and its autonomous bodies like Muslimat, Fatayat, and the Nahdlatul Ulama Daughters' Association (IPPNU) and the Nahdlatul Ulama Sons' Association (IPNU); Muhammadiyah, Aisyiyah, Nasiatul Aisyiyah; PKK, Mosque Youth, and so on to implement existing policies. The role of kyai leadership in strengthening the human resources of students and their community includes: 1) providing education and outreach about the importance of education and health, 2) encouraging the community to prioritize education and self-development, and 3) being an example and role model in the community.

The movement to prevent child marriage must be built through cooperation and synergy between the government, kyai, community, and residents/parents individually. This movement is carried out simultaneously with the hope of reducing the tradition of child marriage and improving the quality of Human Resources in Madura.

The findings of this study indicate that public policies are implemented in a structured, systematic, and large-scale manner. The implementation of the policy faces obstacles and challenges related to the strong tradition of child marriage that has been passed down through generations. The roles of structural and cultural kyai have significant power in helping to address child marriage in a strategic and systematic manner to strengthen human resources in Madura. Kyai are very open, willing, and easily accept new knowledge related to the physical and psychological health impacts of child marriage as material for preaching for the benefit of the community.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Conclusion

Kyai serve as moral and religious guides whose influence shapes not only individual behaviors but also broader societal norms, particularly in culturally rooted communities such as Madura. As community leaders, their fatwas and religious guidance can be transformative in combating longstanding traditions like child marriage. Despite its persistence, the practice of early marriage is increasingly recognized as a social issue that endangers children's development, especially that of girls, by compromising their rights to education, health, and personal growth. Through the authority they command, kyai are in a unique position to reform perceptions and gradually dismantle harmful customs. The strategic

involvement of both structural kyai (those embedded in formal religious institutions) and cultural kyai (those respected through traditional religious charisma) can redirect the community's focus from perpetuating early marriage toward nurturing children's potential and long-term welfare. Their advocacy has the power to translate Islamic principles into real-life commitments to child rights and education.

This study has shown that the voice of the kyai is not only influential but can be an instrument for sustainable community-based change. Their fatwas and teachings when aligned with national child protection laws and educational goals could foster a shared responsibility between religious figures, families, and policymakers. The role of kyai thus transcends religious instruction; they become critical actors in social transformation. In conclusion, empowering kyai with more structured platforms to disseminate messages on the dangers of child marriage, coupled with community-based education, can serve as an effective strategy for mitigating the practice. This approach ensures that interventions resonate culturally and religiously with the Madurese community. Moreover, collaborative efforts involving religious leaders, civil society organizations, and government agencies are essential to amplify and institutionalize these messages. By leveraging the social capital of kyai, society can be guided toward upholding children's rights and supporting their full development before marriage is considered. By comprehensively understanding the role of kyai, this study is expected to serve as a foundational reference for future research aimed at strengthening child marriage prevention efforts based on cultural and religious approaches.

5.2. Limitation and Recommendation

This study is limited in several ways. First, it primarily relies on qualitative observations and descriptive narratives centered on the role of kyai in the Madurese context. While this offers deep insight into the sociocultural dynamics, it does not include comprehensive empirical data or quantitative measurements of the impact of kyai-led interventions. Future research would benefit from a mixed-method approach that includes surveys, interviews, and policy impact assessments to validate the extent of influence exerted by kyai on child marriage practices.

Second, the geographic focus is restricted to Madura, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions in Indonesia or to Muslim communities with different cultural compositions. While Madura presents a unique blend of traditional Islam and local customs, other regions may have distinct dynamics that influence the effectiveness of kyai leadership. Broader comparative studies across regions and Islamic traditions could help refine and expand the strategies proposed in this study.

Third, although this paper emphasizes the importance of the fatwa as a tool for social change, it does not critically analyze the institutional processes behind fatwa dissemination or how communities receive and interpret these religious rulings. A deeper exploration into how fatwas are implemented at the grassroots level including the mechanisms of religious communication and community acceptance would enrich the understanding of their practical impact.

Furthermore, this study acknowledges the complexity of changing cultural norms, especially when traditions are deeply intertwined with religious interpretations. Recommendations are made based on the assumption that kyai are willing and empowered to challenge the status quo. However, resistance from within the religious community itself, or from families who benefit socially or economically from child marriage, can hinder these efforts. Future work should investigate the barriers kyai face in promoting social reform, including institutional resistance, lack of formal authority, or gendered limitations in community outreach.

In terms of recommendations, this research proposes the formal inclusion of kyai in government and non-governmental programming to prevent child marriage. Capacity-building initiatives that align religious values with human rights frameworks could further empower kyai as change agents. Finally, collaborative campaigns that bring together religious leaders, educators, women's groups, and legal institutions are vital for creating an integrated response to child marriage.

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