

YES I DO. BASELINE STUDY IN INDONESIA

A contextualized picture of child marriage, teenage pregnancy and female circumcision

In Indonesia, child marriage, teenage pregnancy and female circumcision are common, particularly among young women. According to the National Marriage Law (1974) the minimum age to marry is 16 for young women and 19 for young men. The Yes I Do study found a general acceptance of child marriage as it was seen as a mechanism to avoid sex out of wedlock and a solution to unintended teenage pregnancy.



Map of Indonesia
West Java and West Nusa Tenggara

The Yes I DO programme (2016-2020) aims to contribute to enhancing young women's decision making space on whether, when and whom to marry as well as on whether, when and with whom to have children. The research component of the programme aims to explore and better understand child marriage, teenage pregnancy, female circumcision and their interlinkages.

The baseline study provides a contextualized picture of the main causes and consequences of child marriage, teenage pregnancy and female circumcision in selected communities in West Nusa Tenggara and West Java. The study also presents young people's opinions on these issues as well as the perspectives of other community members, with a particular emphasis on potential opportunities to engage young people in the YES I DO intervention strategies.

Methodology

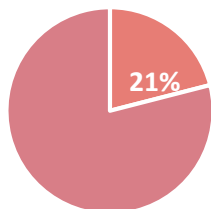
Mixed methods study in West Nusa Tenggara and West Java

By using a mixed methods research design, quantitative and qualitative data were collected in two intervention districts of the YES I DO programme: Sukabumi and Lombok Barat. The methods used included surveys, focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews and key informant interviews. The analysis was based on a thematic content analysis as well as descriptive statistics.

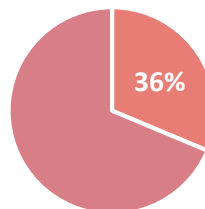
- Household questionnaires with 1,534 female and male respondents; 50% in Sukabumi and 50% in Lombok Barat, 75% females and 25% males
- 35 semi-structured interviews: 7 young women, 5 young men, 2 parents or guardians, 2 elder women, 4 religious and/or community leaders, 3 teachers, 9 health and social workers, 3 youth organization staff
- 16 focus group discussions with young women, young men, and parents or guardians
- 12 key informant interviews which included 3 non-governmental organization staff and 9 district level decision makers

Results

The baseline data confirm that in Indonesia gender is significantly associated with child marriage and teenage parenthood. The child marriage rate was much higher among female respondents (21%) than among male respondents (1%), and higher in Lombok Barat (25%) than in Sukabumi (18%). Teenage pregnancy was more prevalent than child marriage. Of all female respondents between 20 and 24 years, 36% had experienced a teenage pregnancy. It was less common among young men to become father under the age of 20 (2%).



CHILD MARRIAGE RATE
AMONG FEMALE RESPONDENTS
(18-24 years)



TEENAGE PREGNANCY RATE
AMONG FEMALE RESPONDENTS
(20-24 years)

Child marriage: a solution rather than a problem?

Participants highlighted various reasons for the practice of child marriage: it would avoid pre-marital sex or *zina*, help alleviate the economic burden of the family, and it could be a result of the influence of cultural traditions such as *merariq* (in Lombok Barat), little educational aspirations, and unintended teenage pregnancies. The study shows a general acceptance of the practice of child marriage among young people. More than half of the respondents (67%) agreed that child marriage has benefits for young women, young men and their families, and 82% saw child marriage as a solution to teenage pregnancy.

Limited access to contraceptives for unmarried youth

Pre-marital sex was mentioned as the main cause of teenage pregnancy. Participants argued that pre-marital sex was influenced by peer pressure, media exposure, lack of accurate sexual and reproductive health information and limited access to reproductive health services. The baseline data reveal a relatively high access to information on sexual and reproductive health and rights (70%, social media was an important source), as well as a relatively high knowledge about modern contraceptives (65%). However, 68% of the respondents reported having never used reproductive health services, which might be related to a prevailing norm that contraception can only be used within marriage. The government does not facilitate provision of contraceptives to unmarried youth.

"But we are not going to give contraceptives to unmarried teenagers. That would mean we are promoting pre-marital sex." (Female midwife, Lombok Barat District)

Child marriage to avoid pre-marital sex and unintended pregnancies

Pregnancies outside marriage were seen as a social, economic and psychological burden, particularly for young women. Baseline data show that parents are the main persons to whom young women and men would turn to in case of an unintended teenage pregnancy. In this context, parents openly argued that child marriage was often preferred to avoid unintended pregnancies outside marriage and all the attached consequences. This position was reinforced by traditional leaders' advice.

Although parents and the immediate family seemed to play an important role in determining whether marriages could be conducted or not, the majority of married respondents stated that they got married by their own choice (females 89%, males 80%). The study findings indicate that there is limited knowledge among respondents about the minimum legal age of marriage: 38% was aware of the minimum age.

Child marriage also led to teenage pregnancy, revealing that both issues could be cause or consequence of each other. Parents showed limited awareness of the consequences of child marriage and cases of risky teenage pregnancies appeared common. Local midwives provided education that the minimum age for the first pregnancy should be 20 to avoid health risks for mother and child. Despite this, young women often were not aware of the risks associated with pregnancy at young age, such as anaemia, malnutrition or maternal death.

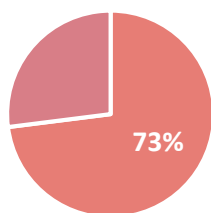
'If you are married you do not go to school any longer. You drop out of school'

Social, economic and educational impacts were the most commonly mentioned in relation to both child marriage and teenage pregnancy. Child marriage made young women economically dependent on their husbands and led in some cases to (child) divorce. The educational impact was the most mentioned, particularly for young women.

On the one hand, the study shows that there was a general assumption that it is not necessary for young women to pursue higher education, because they would eventually become housewives. Getting married was seen as the most rational option, particularly when a young woman received a proposal. Also, when young people dropped out of school, marriage was seen as the logical next step.

On the other hand, school drop-out appeared as the main and direct consequence of child marriage and teenage pregnancy. Participants argued that in case of unintended pregnancies, students are often expelled from school, also if they marry. Baseline data suggest that school expulsion and drop-out due to unintended pregnancies and/or child marriage mainly affect young women. 91% of all respondents stated that young women who experience child marriage drop out of school. Of all female respondents who had ever dropped out of school, 31% reported marriage as a reason. Among male respondents none dropped out of school because of marriage.

Female circumcision: a cultural practice with little relation to child marriage



FEMALE CIRCUMSICION RATE

In Sukabumi, 92% and in Lombok Barat, 53% of the female respondents indicated to be circumcised. Although in some areas female circumcision was related to marriageability of young women, the practice did not appear directly linked to either child marriage or teenage pregnancy. 61% of the respondents perceived that female circumcision had no influence on marriage. Female circumcision was generally seen as an important cultural practice conducted by traditional birth attendants. It was perceived as a mean to control young women's sexual desire.

Circumcised young women argued that they would circumcise their daughters in the future. The majority of respondents (73%) did not know how female circumcision is done, which might be due to its execution at young age and differences in the practice per region. There are no clear regulations regarding female circumcision in Indonesia, and most people did not know if regulations exist. 59% of the respondents thought that the practice did not contravene any regulations and 31% claimed not to know whether it is against any government regulation.

To sum up, in West Nusa Tenggara and West Java, child marriage, teenage pregnancy and female circumcision were common and influenced by sexual norms and cultural traditions. Avoiding premarital sex was a key driver of child marriage, together with limited educational aspirations and job opportunities, particularly for young women. Access to contraception was dependent on young people's marriage status, and unintended pregnancies led to school dropout or expulsion, also mainly affecting young women.

✓ Recommendations

Recommendations for the YES I DO intervention strategies:

- Work with schools, community health centres, youth groups and social media to increase young people's knowledge on sexual and reproductive health and rights as well as information about and access to modern contraceptive methods
- Share information on young people's sexuality and rights with the rest of the community, and address female circumcision from various perspectives (medical, religious, psychological, bodily integrity)
- Promote and support formal and alternative educational opportunities for young women who marry and/or have children
- Support young women's economic empowerment through capacity strengthening around entrepreneurship and the creation of economic support groups for married, widowed and divorced young women

- Expand the involvement of religious leaders and organizations in gender awareness activities and encourage collaboration between youth and religious groups

Recommendations for further research:

- Explore the barriers and opportunities for intergenerational communication around sexual and reproductive health and rights
- Explore young women and men’s preferences around marriage and family formation: adolescent agency versus family pressure
- Explore underlying reasons to opt for non-circumcision, particularly in the district of Lombok Barat where the practice is less prevalent
- Explore young women and men’s experiences with divorce

The Baseline Study for the YES I DO programme in Indonesia was conducted by a team of researchers from the Royal Tropical Institute (KIT) and from the Centre for Gender and Sexuality Studies of the Universitas Indonesia.

