Mental health and home life in the early phase of marriage: An evaluation of early married and non-early married women

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Abstract

Background: The first five years of marriage are a vulnerable period in home life, particularly for early married women. This is a challenge for them because of their lack of physical, mental and financial readiness.

Purpose: This study discusses the impact of early marriage on mental health—including depression, anxiety, and stress—as well as various dimensions of home life, such as domestic violence, life satisfaction, and marital satisfaction. Focusing on women in Lamongan, Indonesia, it compares those who married early with those who did not during the first five years of marriage.

Methods: This cross-sectional study included 210 women, both early married and non-early married. Depression, anxiety, and stress were assessed using the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-42), while domestic violence was measured with the Dating Violence Questionnaire (DVQ). Life satisfaction was evaluated using the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), and marital satisfaction was assessed with the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMS). Logistic regression analysis with $\alpha=5\%$ and 95% confidence interval was conducted to determine the relationship between early marriage and depression, anxiety, stress, domestic violence, life satisfaction, marital satisfaction.

Results: Early marriage was significantly associated with higher levels of depression ($p<0.001$), anxiety ($p<0.001$), stress ($p<0.001$), domestic violence ($p<0.001$), life dissatisfaction ($p<0.001$) and marital dissatisfaction ($p=0.020$). Early married women were nearly nine times more likely to experience domestic violence compared to those who married later.

Conclusion: Early marriage needs to be prevented because its impact is very detrimental to women, especially in relation to domestic violence.

Keywords: domestic violence; early marriage; life satisfaction; marital satisfaction; mental health

Introduction

The legal age for marriage is set at 18 years; however, in practice, many women still marry before reaching that age. Thus, ending early marriage is a key priority in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to promote gender equality and safeguard children's rights (Kanji et al., 2023). Early marriage constitutes a human rights violation that leads to serious demographic and health impacts, yet the practice continues to be widespread (Kumari & Shekhar, 2023). The practice of early marriage occurs in various developing countries (Anggreni et al., 2023) and almost all Muslim countries in the world, including Indonesia (Sopyan et al., 2023). This is a challenge for Indonesia to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Central Statistics Agency (BPS) noted that Indonesia's early marriage rate stood at 10.82% in 2019 and declined slightly to 10.18% in 2020. Meanwhile, a report from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

in 2018 estimated that around 1.2 million women were married before turning 18, with approximately 432,000 of them becoming pregnant as early as eight years old or younger (Sopyan et al., 2023).

Early marriage is widespread in various Muslim countries, this is related to socio-economic and socio-cultural factors (Abdallah et al., 2023; Agarwal et al., 2023; Suyanto et al., 2023; Torabi & Bagi, 2024), such as wealth index, unemployment, media exposure (Abdallah et al., 2023; Billah et al., 2023), age, difference in education of partners, age of first sexual intercourse, parity (Mathabatha & Tsawe, 2023), low education, living in rural areas and dependent on parental decision making (Cameron et al., 2023; Gebeyehu et al., 2023). The traditional Indonesian cultural view indirectly legitimizes the right of parents to hasten their daughters to marry regardless of age and who the child marries. In addition, another contributing factor of early marriage is teenage pregnancy (Widyastari et al., 2020), or dating (Grijns & Horii, 2018).

Home life requires physical, psychological, social, and financial readiness; so it is necessary to consider age. Psychological immaturity and economic difficulties of early married adolescents often cause marriage failure (Law et al., 2019). Additionally, arranged marriages and forced marriages among adolescents are also closely related to divorce (Kashif et al., 2020). This situation contradicts the true purpose of marriage, which is to build a peaceful, prosperous, and harmonious family. Family welfare can only be achieved if it is supported by strong pillars and fulfilled by physical and spiritual needs (Fauzan & Amroni, 2020).

In this context, the early phase of marriage becomes a highly crucial period, especially for women. Adaptation during this time significantly influences the quality and sustainability of the marriage in the future (Rocha et al., 2024; Yazdanpanahi & Beygi, 2019). Adjustment and responsibility of husband and wife are very important to build a successful home life. The early years of marriage are a vulnerable period and are also often referred to as a critical era in marriage because there is still little experience in living together, especially in the first five years (Afifah & Savira, 2023). The early years of marriage are often marked by conflict between spouses, leading to emotional tension. The first five years, in particular, can be a challenging period as couples frequently face disagreements in their home life (Sandri & Supraba, 2022).

As attention to the issue of early marriage has increased, several studies have highlighted its impact on women's well-being. Research has shown that early marriage often leads to school dropout (Garcia et al., 2025; Sagalova et al., 2021), economic dependency and poverty (Nagaraj & Theboral, 2024; Rahayu et al., 2020; Sagalova et al., 2021), and a higher risk of mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, and stress (Ayşe, 2024; Jayawardana, 2022; Kaya et al., 2021; Sezgin & Punamäki, 2020; Yadav et al., 2022). In addition, early married women tend to face limitations in making decisions within the household compared to those who marry at a later age (Abera et al., 2020; Tauseef & Sufian, 2024). On the other hand, women who marry at a more mature age tend to show better psychological adjustment and experience greater satisfaction in their family lives (Jayawardana, 2022; Pekel & Gülçin, 2019).

Although there is a growing body of research on early marriage, comparative studies that directly examine the mental health conditions and household dynamics between early-married women and those who marry later remain relatively scarce—particularly during the initial stages of marriage. Most existing studies tend to emphasize long-term impacts or general health outcomes without delving into the critical transition phase immediately after marriage. However, this period is vital, as it significantly influences long-term marital satisfaction and women's psychological well-being. Therefore, this study adopts a different approach by evaluating the impact of early marriage on mental health—including symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress—as well as various aspects of domestic life, such as experiences of domestic violence, life satisfaction, and marital satisfaction during the early phase of marriage. This analysis is conducted through a comparative lens between early-married and non-early-married women.

Materials and Methods

Design
This cross-sectional survey study was conducted in July-September 2024 in Lamongan Regency, Indonesia. This study used four subdistricts with the highest marriage rates in the last five years.

Participants and Setting
The sample size of 210 respondents was determined using quota sampling. Two groups were targeted: 105 women who experienced early marriage and 105 women who did not. These quotas were established to ensure equal representation of both groups, which are central to the research objectives. The sampling was conducted in regions within Lamongan Regency, Indonesia, known to have the highest rates of early marriage.

Participation was voluntary, and the recruitment followed non-probability sampling principles, meaning the sample size was not calculated using statistical formulas but rather guided by the set quotas. While this approach enabled focused comparison, it also introduces a limitation: individuals who chose to participate may have a particular interest or perspective on the topic, potentially affecting generalizability. The inclusion criteria for this study were women who were currently married or divorced, marriage age 0-5 years, and had only been married once. The exclusion criteria included women in polygamous or polyandrous marriages.

Variable

The independent variable in this study was marital status (early married vs. not early married). The dependent variables to be studied include stress, anxiety, and depression, which are aspects of a person's mental health (John et al., 2023). In addition, other variables studied include domestic violence, life satisfaction, and marital satisfaction, which are part of the aspects of home life (Koçak, 2025; Salari, 2023; Sztányi-Szekér et al., 2025).

Instruments

The instruments in this study consisted of a demographic questionnaire, Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-42), Dating Violence Questionnaire (DVQ), Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), and Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMS). The demographic questionnaire was used to examine age, length of a marriage, education level, occupation, husband's occupation, family income and early marriage. The DASS-42 was used to measure depression (14 items), stress (14 items), and anxiety (14 items) (S. H. Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). The validity and reliability results of the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for depression, anxiety, and stress were 0.91, 0.84; and 0.90, respectively (P. F. Lovibond, 1995). The DVQ was used to measure domestic violence experienced in the past year (i.e., in the past 12 months) with validity and reliability results of 0.92 (Indu et al., 2011). The SWLS is a widely used instrument designed to measure an individual's global life satisfaction, which is a key component of subjective well-being. The validity and reliability of the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this scale was 0.87 (Diener et al., 1985). The KMS was used to measure marital satisfaction of married couples (Schumm et al., 1986).

Data collection

The data in this study were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27. Prior to conducting the multivariate logistic regression analysis, a bivariate analysis was performed between each independent variable and the dependent variable to identify potential predictors. Variables with a p-value<0.25 in the bivariate analysis were considered for inclusion in the multivariate model.

Subsequently, a multivariate logistic regression analysis was conducted to evaluate the association

Table 1. Respondents' demographic data

Variables	Category	n	%
Age	Mean	21	
Lenght of Marriages	<1 Year	14	6.7
	1 Year	44	21.0
	2 Years	55	26.2
	3 years	26	12.4
	4 years	31	14.8
	5 years	40	19.1
Occupation	Not Working	147	70.0
	Fisherman/Farmer	3	1.4
	Self-Employed	46	21.9
	Private Employee	10	4.8
	Civil Servant/Police/Military	4	1.9
Husband's Occupation	Not Working	8	3.8
	Fisherman/Farmer	50	23.8
	Self-Employed	127	60.5
	Private Employee	21	10.0
	Civil Servant/Police/Military	4	1.9
Educational Level	Elementary School	8	3.8
	Junior High School	62	29.5
	Senior High School	117	55.7
	Diploma/Bachelor	23	11.0
Family Income	<Minimum Wage	120	57.1
	≥Minimum Wage	90	42.9

Table 2. Multivariate Logistic Regression Analysis of Early Marriage and Its Association with Mental Health and Home Life Outcomes

Variabels	Non-Early Marriage		Early Marriage		Sig.	OR	95% Confidence Interval	
	N	%	N	%			Lower	Upper
Depression								
Normal	86	81.9	41	39.0	0.000	7.807	4.191	14.556
Mild	10	9.5	17	16.2				
Moderate	7	6.7	17	16.2				
Severe	2	1.9	13	12.4				
Very Severe	0	0.0	17	16.2				
Anxiety								
Normal	75	71.4	28	26.7	0.000	6.753	3.846	11.870
Mild	6	5.7	10	9.5				
Moderate	14	13.3	24	22.9				
Severe	6	5.7	12	11.4				
Very Severe	4	3.8	31	29.5				
Stres								
Normal	84	80.0	56	53.3	0.000	3.920	2.134	7.207
Mild	10	9.5	8	7.6				
Moderate	11	10.5	37	35.2				
Severe	0	0.0	4	3.8				
Domestic Violence								
No	98	93.3	62	59.0	0.000	9.710	4.110	22.941
Yes	7	6.7	43	41.0				
Life Satisfaction								
Extremely Dissatisfied	1	1.0	1	1.0	0.000	5.302	1.099	2.974
Dissatisfied	3	2.9	9	8.6				
Slightly Dissatisfied	10	9.5	40	38.1				
Neutral	21	20.0	26	24.8				
Slightly Satisfied	55	52.4	26	24.8				
Satisfied	15	14.3	3	2.9				
Extremely Satisfied	0	0.0	0	0.0				
Marital Satisfaction								
Extremely Dissatisfied	1	1.0	1	1.0	0.020	1.808	4.110	22.941
Very Dissatisfied	0	0.0	0	0.0				
Somewhat Dissatisfied	2	1.9	8	7.6				
Mixed	27	25.7	31	29.5				
Somewhat Satisfied	5	4.8	14	13.3				
Very Satisfied	20	19.0	15	14.3				
Extremely Satisfied	50	47.6	36	34.3				

between each independent variable and the dependent variable. This analysis included multiple predictors in the model simultaneously; however, no additional covariates were included for adjustment. The significance level for all statistical tests was set at $p < 0.05$. In addition, this research received ethical approval from the Ethics Committee of Muhammadiyah University of Lamongan (Approval Number: 341/EC/KEPK–S2/12/2024), ensuring that all research procedures complied with the applicable ethical standards.

Results

The study included 105 early married women and 105 non-early married women, with a mean age of 21 years. The duration of the participants' marriages varied, with the majority having been married for two years (26.2%). In terms of employment, most of the women in this study were unemployed (70%), while the majority of their husbands were self-employed (60.5%). Regarding education, more than half of the participants had completed high school (55.7%). Additionally, most of the participants' families had an income below the applicable minimum wage (57.1%), reflecting their household's economic conditions.

In the logistic regression analysis, all predictor variables were treated as categorical, with non-early married women serving as the reference group. Table 2 shows that early marriage significantly influences multiple aspects of mental health and home life, including domestic violence (OR = 9.710; 95% CI: 4.110–22.941), depression (OR = 7.808; 95% CI: 4.191–14.556), anxiety (OR = 6.753; 95% CI: 3.846–11.870), stress (OR = 3.920; 95% CI: 2.134–7.207), life satisfaction (OR = 5.302; 95% CI: 1.099–2.974), and marital satisfaction (OR = 1.808; 95% CI: 4.110–22.941). These findings indicate that early marriage increases the risk of experiencing various mental health issues and challenges in home life. Compared to non-early married women, early married women were more likely to report depression, anxiety, stress, life dissatisfaction, and marital dissatisfaction.

Discussion

Our findings identify that early married women were at higher risk of experiencing domestic violence than non-early married women. In line with previous studies, early married women experience more violence from their partners than non-early married women (John et al., 2023). Early marriage is closely related to the occurrence of violence by intimate partners (Suyanto et al., 2023). Studies in Pakistan and Mesir indicate that women who marry early are more likely to experience physical and psychological abuse from their partners (Charan et al., 2024; Verma & Nair, 2022). In some cases we found, that psychological violence is often experienced by early married women, including restrictions on buying goods, restrictions on managing finances and restrictions on making decisions, even insults. Early married women usually depend on their husbands in terms of economy because the family's main income generally comes from their husbands (Zulfa et al., 2024). In addition, early marriage can place girls in a more disadvantageous position regarding decision making (Tomar et al., 2021). This dependency places them in a vulnerable position, making it more difficult to resist unwanted actions. Early married women also frequently experience insults from their partners, with verbal violence being a common occurrence during arguments (Zulfa et al., 2024). Individuals who marry early are often not emotionally mature enough to handle the responsibilities of marriage. When both partners, especially women, are unprepared for these challenges, conflicts and relationship issues can escalate, often resulting in verbal insults.

Early married women are at greater risk of experiencing depression, anxiety and stress than non-early married women. Early marriage has an impact on women's psychological well-being, which ultimately decreases overall psychological well-being, potentially increasing mental health problems later in life (John et al., 2023). Previous studies have shown that early marriage is associated with symptoms of anxiety, depression (Ayşe, 2024) and stress (Collier et al., 2023). Early married women are reported to experience higher levels of depression (Sezgin & Punamäki, 2020). Nearly 46% of depressive symptoms are experienced by individuals who marry early and the incidence of depression is associated with financial problems (Fakhari et al., 2020). In addition to lacking psychological readiness, early married couples are often not financially prepared. In this study, the majority of early married couples had an income below the minimum wage.

Early married women have a higher risk of life dissatisfaction than non-early married women. Early married women experience a lower trajectory of life satisfaction (Kanji et al., 2023). Early marriage affects adolescent girls' interpersonal relationships, narrowing educational and career opportunities, emotional well-being, and access to support networks (Nhampoca & Maritz, 2024). This makes early married womaan experience limited experience and self-development. They do not have the opportunity to explore their potential, whether in terms of education, career, or self-development. Marriage that occurs before reaching full emotional and mental maturity can limit their opportunities to pursue life goals, which can contribute to feelings of dissatisfaction.

Early married women have a higher risk of marital dissatisfaction than non-early married women. Previous studies have shown that there is a significant relationship between age of marriage and marital satisfaction (Hajihasani & Sim, 2019). Adolescents' hopes and expectations for marriage may be affected by romanticization factors or cultural influences that consider marriage to be the main goal in life. If marriage does not match these expectations, feelings of disappointment or dissatisfaction may arise.

This study offers valuable insights by directly comparing early-married and non-early-married women in the early phase of marriage, a period often overlooked in previous research. The use of validated instruments and the inclusion of diverse mental health and home life indicators strengthen the credibility of the findings. However, several limitations should be acknowledged. The use of

quota sampling limits the generalizability of the results, as the sample may not fully represent the broader population. Additionally, reliance on self-reported data could introduce response bias, particularly in sensitive topics such as domestic violence and marital dissatisfaction. Future studies employing longitudinal designs and more extensive, randomized samples are recommended to validate and expand upon these findings.

Conclusions

Early married woman may be more vulnerable to domestic violence, depression, anxiety, stress, life dissatisfaction, and marital dissatisfaction. They tend to be less emotionally and psychologically prepared to face home life. This can increase the potential for conflict in the home, such as in financial management, childcare, and communication with partners. They may have difficulty adjusting to their roles as wives and mothers, especially if they do not have economic independence or sufficient education. This study can reveal how differences in age at marriage affect mental health and home life. This study can be a basis for various parties, including the government, social institutions, and communities, in designing comprehensive premarital education policies and programs that need to be strengthened, especially for prospective brides and grooms who marry at a young age.

Declaration of Interest
None

Data Availability
Datasets generated and/or analyzed during the current investigation are accessible from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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