

## Government Communication Barriers in Preventing Child Marriage in Jember Regency

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### Abstract

*The phenomenon of child marriage has become a frequently heard social problem and is widespread in various regions, including Jember Regency. The researcher aimed to determine a communication strategy to stop child marriage in Jember Regency by the Child Protection and Family Planning Agency (DP3AKB). This research employed qualitative methods through interviews, observation, and documentation. The results indicate that the Government Communications Agency, specifically the Jember Child Protection Department, identified several obstacles to ending child marriage in Jember. These challenges relate to the Jember City Child Protection Agency, particularly its belief in traditional customs, low public understanding, lack of human resources, and limited communication with various stakeholders. Therefore, a culturally based approach or religious leader-based approach is needed, given the community's belief in traditional customs. Volunteers need to be recruited to ensure that more parties are involved in child marriage prevention programs.*

### Keywords

Barriers; Communication; Prevention; Child Marriage



### I. Introduction

The phenomenon of early marriage is a common social problem and is found throughout Indonesia, including Jember Regency. Besides being a carnival city, Jember also has a high rate of early marriage, with 1,469 requests for child marriage dispensations and 1,451 decisions granted, according to the 2020 Religious Court Cases Data (Dini & Prayogo, 2021). In Jember, due to promiscuity, child marriage is more common, resulting in unwed pregnancies. This problem is not limited to urban areas but has become a social issue in rural areas (Tri Maharani & Kholifah, 2023). The government is also aware of the stunting and maternal mortality rates, and prevention efforts include stricter requirements for obtaining marriage licenses. Numerous factors contribute to the increase in early marriage in Jember. Young marriages can face health problems due to preterm birth, malnutrition, domestic violence, and a greater increase in reproductive and sexual health issues. Moreover, compared to unmarried girls, they fare worse across all social and economic indicators, including higher poverty rates and lower education levels. This also impacts maternal and child health postpartum, as their bodies are immature and susceptible to complications during pregnancy and childbirth. Dropping out of school is common in several areas of Jember. Early marriage interrupts their education and limits their opportunities to develop their potential. The cycle of poverty is further strengthened by early marriage. Due to their inadequate education and skills, they tend to be dependent on their partners and are highly vulnerable to economic problems within the family. Domestic violence is a common occurrence, one of the contributing factors being the relatively early age, coupled with instability in emotional control, which leads to domestic violence (Dini & Prayogo, 2021). The Child Protection Agency. plays a crucial role in managing child

marriage, both nationally and in Jember Regency. Through outreach, the DP3AKB educates the public about the effects of early marriage, including the health and social issues that may arise, such as stunting and increased maternal mortality. DP3AKB also provides mentoring and data collection, especially for newlyweds, including those seeking marriage dispensations. They will be involved in collecting data on couples who have not been officially registered to ensure residents have valid population administration documents. DP3AKB also collaborates with numerous institutions, including the Health Office and the National Population and Family Planning Agency (BKKBN), to develop strategies to reduce early marriage. The goal is to ensure all women in Jember Regency have equal access and rights. In an effort to reduce early marriage, DP3AKB implements its programs through community engagement, involving local communities in supporting children and women. Several obstacles must be overcome in communicating this message. In Jember, early marriage is still considered part of the culture or tradition. The idea that marrying young can solve economic or social problems can hinder efforts to change public mindsets. This tradition is often a key reason why families and communities support early marriage. Low levels of education and knowledge, along with a lack of access to quality education and knowledge about the negative impacts of early marriage, can make it difficult for communities to accept information provided by the DP3AKB. Some individuals avoid early marriage because they are unaware of the health, economic, and social risks it entails. Persistent gender inequality in some communities often leads to decisions about early marriage being made by families or communities, without considering the girl's wishes (Ahsandy Ramadhan Suardi & Fida, 2023). This makes it difficult to convey messages about the importance of children's rights and gender equality. Limited access to media and technology. While social media and technology can be important tools in campaigns to prevent early marriage, not all communities have adequate access. In remote rural areas, technological limitations hinder the effective dissemination of information, which can hinder the effective implementation of outreach programs and campaigns.

The researcher chose the title "Government Communication Barriers in Preventing Child Marriage in Jember" because she found a significant decrease in the number of early marriage cases in Jember Regency. This decrease demonstrates the success of strategic efforts to address this problem, particularly those of the Women's Empowerment, Child Protection, and Family Planning Agency. This led the researcher to delve deeper into the communication strategies implemented by DP3AKB to reduce early marriage rates in the Jember region. Because communication is a crucial aspect in conveying messages and raising public awareness, the researcher sought to gain a deeper understanding of how communication strategies are designed and implemented. By examining the strategies used, the researcher explored what steps are effective in reducing early marriage and how these communications are communicated.

## **II. Research Methods**

Widi Darmadiatmika Tanaya (2024) conducted a study titled "Efforts of the Women's Empowerment and Child Protection Agency to Reduce Child Marriage Rates in Kolaka Regency, Southeast Sulawesi Province." The study findings indicate that the Kolaka Regency Child Protection Agency has attempted to reduce child marriages and has effectively implemented its management duties. The method used was descriptive qualitative. This study differs in its focus on analyzing the role of the DP3AKB (Regional

Child Protection Agency) in reducing child marriage cases. Similarities exist in the similar discussion of efforts to reduce child marriage.

Silvia Tri Maharani and Emy Kholifah (2024) conducted a study titled "Implementation of Local Government Policy in Addressing Early Marriage in Kalisat District, Jember Regency." The study findings indicate that the policy's success is influenced by several factors, including collaboration between the government, the private sector, the community, religious leaders, and NGOs. This study indicates that child marriage in Jember is more common due to promiscuity, which results in pregnancy. This is not limited to cities, but has become a social problem in rural areas. Different studies focus on the implementation of regional regulations regarding the elimination of early marriage. The similarities between the studies are the involvement of local government agencies in addressing the early marriage rate in Jember.

According to Scott M. Cutlip, Allen H. Center, and Glen M. Broom, public relations is the management responsibility to build and maintain beneficial relationships between companies and individuals. This definition positions public relations as a management function, as all organizations must address relationships with their publics. According to The Eleventh Edition of Cutlip and Center's *Effective Public Relations*, there are several stages that must be carried out (Berns & Berns, 1969): (1) Fact-finding, which involves searching for data, analyzing facts, and interpreting public opinion related to the situation before formulating activities, such as public opinion and related company policies. (2) Planning, which can be defined as a plan, a consistent and sequential breakdown of the actions required to achieve a specific goal. (3) Communication, which is verbal communication that requires face-to-face communication, but can also be done digitally. (4) Evaluation, in this case, the main objective is to check whether activities are actually carried out according to plan or based on survey results.

This study employed a qualitative approach, using descriptive data to uncover the phenomenon of child marriage in Jember. The data were gathered from selected informants, namely the Head of the Child Protection Division, the Children's Forum, and the Jember Genre Insan. This study collected data from interviews, observations, and documentation. The goal was to present the collected data in detail and appropriately to support the information obtained regarding the DP3AKB's communication strategies in preventing child marriage in Jember.

Data collection methods were used to support the data collection process. The researcher used initial data collected from the research subjects. Interviews, observation, and documentation were used as the data collection method. The data collection methods were as follows:

Data collection through interviews is a dialogue between two or more people with direct questions and answers involving the informant and the interviewer to obtain information. In this study, the researcher intended to gather necessary information regarding the strategies in preventing child marriage in Jember.

Data is a term typically used in qualitative research methods. However, in qualitative methods, the term "data" is defined as any information, images, or photographs, both oral and written, that answers the research questions stated in the problem statement. Several qualitative data collection methods exist, including interviews, observation, documentation, and discussion. It is crucial for researchers to understand the rationale for each method to obtain information and to understand the types of problems that require interview, observation, and discussion techniques (Iryana & Kawasati, 2012).

The research method employed by the researcher was purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a technique used to select target subjects based on certain characteristics

assessed as relevant to the population being studied. The purpose of this research was to determine the communication strategy used by the Institution responsible for Women's Empowerment, Child Protection, and Family Planning (DP3AKB) in preventing child marriage in Jember.

The targeted subjects were the Head of the Child Protection Division and several other members of the Division. As mentioned, research techniques and methods must align with the criteria or characteristics of the appropriate informants, determined by the researcher. The following informants were then selected by the researcher:

1. Head of the Child Protection Division, Dr. Joko Sutriswanto, M.Si.
2. Child Protection Member, Alif Rosa Indahsari.
3. Young Expert Policy Analysis Member, Joko Purwadi.
4. Additional data or complements to existing research data. Therefore, the additional informants are:
5. Young Expert Policy Analysis Member, Judi Nugraha
6. Jember Children's Forum, Kalista
7. Jember Genre Insan, Teguh Andi.

This study employed qualitative methods. This technique was implemented through several processes, from data collection to data evaluation. Currently, the previously filtered information used by the researcher as a guide for analyzing strategies was communicated to the Women's Empowerment, Child Protection, and Family Planning Service (DP3AKB). Public relations also makes efforts to build and maintain good communication between the organization and the public, as well as a good image and reputation because the success and failure of the organization are influenced by Public Relations activities (Nugraha & Aryani, 2019). Cutlip and Center's theory inspired the two-way communication model by James E. Grunig and Todd Hunt to develop a two-way communication model, which they introduced as an important derivative of the basic theory of public communication.

### III. Results and Discussion

The Jember Regency Child Protection and Family Planning Agency (DP3AKB) is a government agency under the regional government. Its primary responsibility is to address issues related to family planning at the provincial level, women's empowerment, and child protection, or under the Child Protection and Family Planning Agency, policies related to women's empowerment, child protection, and population monitoring through the use of quality family planning programs.

At the urban level, the Child Protection and Family Planning Agency (DP3AKB) participates in strengthening child protection and managing the female population. This agency collaborates with various related institutions, including other government agencies, community organizations, and non-governmental organizations, with the vision and mission of enhancing women's roles. This agency strives to increase women's participation in various areas of life, including economic, social, and political life.

In terms of child protection, the Child Protection and Family Planning Agency (DP3AKB) prevents various situations that threaten children's rights, such as violence, exploitation, and child marriage. Through outreach and support for stakeholders, this institution creates a safe and supportive environment for children's growth and development. In the area of family planning, this institution implements various programs to control population growth and enhance family participation, such as the use of birth control pills and family planning programs. This program aims to ensure that the

community understands the importance of family planning for a healthy future through programs designed for families.

Based on research conducted by researchers from the Jember Child Protection Department (DP3AKB), several obstacles were identified to ending child marriage in Jember, including:

### 3.1 Lack of Human Resources

The limited availability of human resources (HR) is a problem that hampers the Child Protection Division's work program. This obstacle impacts their strategy to prevent child marriage in Jember Regency. The Child Protection Division consists of six staff: four civil servants (ASN) and two non-civil servants. However, many members of the community require their presence in outreach activities.

Informant Joko Purwadi also stated that:

*"Many people are in need, but we can't meet their needs. However, even if we can't, we promise we will be there another time."*

*Informant Alif Rosa Indahsari said:*

*"Every time we go out, we always bring at least two people, one of whom is an operator. So, we're understaffed. So the solution is to use accelerated collaboration, namely collaboration between sectors."*

Collaboration has been found to be a method and approach to improve cooperation between stakeholders in decision-making and enhance understanding of how teams work to help resolve unresolved public issues (Abdul Sabariuddin, Adnan, & Maulid, 2024). This is also explained in a study entitled "Implementation of Interprofessional Collaboration Among Healthcare Workers in Indonesian Hospitals," which found that healthcare workers collaborate to improve patient safety and satisfaction, as well as the quality of services provided by hospitals, thereby improving patient safety and reducing negative impacts on patient health (Ita, Pramana, & Righo, 2021). This demonstrates that accelerated collaboration is crucial in alleviating problems and achieving optimal goals. Similarly, with the assistance of the Jember Regency Women's Empowerment, Child Protection, and Family Planning Office (DP3AKB), they are collaborating across sectors to alleviate existing problems. This provides an opportunity to create sustainable solutions.

### 3.2 Community Belief in Customs and Culture

Some villagers still believe in customs and culture, making them commonplace among them. Many consider child marriage to be a necessary practice to prevent the sin of adultery. Beyond considering it adultery, they ensure their children do not engage in harmful activities, such as promiscuity, which could ultimately tarnish the family's reputation. This is religiously justified, and this belief is often reinforced by religious beliefs. Therefore, it is not uncommon for them to marry off their children at an early age. However, it is important to be aware of the potential impacts of child marriage before committing such a decision, sacrificing their future.

Informant Alif Rosa Indahsari said:

*"There are some people who don't want to attend, they're still concerned about customary law. So, what has been difficult for DP3AKB is the existence of customary law, namely preventing adultery. When we ask them while chatting, their parents*



*always say, 'My child's scales are meteng sek mbak, won't come back,' and in the village, most engagements are immediately married in secret."*

This concludes that the beliefs of the people of Jember Regency in several villages believe that one way to avoid adultery is to marry off their children regardless of their physical and mental preparation, to avoid promiscuity and maintain the family's good name. Traditionally, marriages often occur because the parents have arranged their children's marriages, which is done to strengthen the family ties between the bride and groom (Rizkiyah & Faridy, 2020). For example, a study titled "Case Study: Unregistered Marriage and Its Impact on Family Welfare in Puspanegara Village, Citerup District, Bogor Regency" found that one contributing factor to unregistered marriages among the people of Puspanegara Village is promiscuity between men and women, leading to pregnancy outside of marriage. Because parents do not want to be recognized, they marry their children unregistered, citing the need to preserve the family's reputation (Arrosyid, 2003).

### **3.3 Lack of Communication Between Various Parties**

Communication is crucial and essential for achieving shared goals. It can also resolve conflicts, strengthen relationships between people, and provide benefits in sharing information. Lack of communication is a major obstacle and can lead to misunderstandings between parties. No creature on earth can survive without interaction, as interaction is the means by which beings communicate. Without interaction, humans cannot convey ideas and knowledge, leading to society's development and a desolate world. Informant Joko Sutriswanto stated that.

*"From 2021 to 2023, communication was difficult; no policymakers helped us; only the Regional Apparatus Organizations (OPDs)," said informant Joko Purwadi. "Communication between OPDs continued to be lacking, so we held a coordination meeting. Through this coordination meeting, the PERMA (Regional Regulation) at the central government can be implemented in Jember Regency through a Regent's Circular Letter."*

This concludes that lack of communication can hinder the actions taken by the Child Protection Agency (DP3AKB) to stop child marriage in Jember, but the coordination meeting is a solution to overcome these obstacles by implementing central policies, namely through the Regent's Circular. It is clear that communication is as important as the existence of the Regent's Circular as an intermediary connecting central policies and regional implementers. This states that communication is the core of successful policy implementation. The implementation of a public policy. There are many interests from several individuals involved, the need for consideration so that the policy can be implemented properly, because policies that do not accommodate these interests tend to face resistance and difficulties in their implementation (Tri Maharani & Kholifah, 2023). As with the study entitled "Communication of the Formation of Regional Regulations of North Central Timor Regency by the Regional Government and the Representative Council" that communication will have a negative impact on the performance of both institutions, this factor causes communication problems is the existence of sectoral egos where institutions only prioritize their own interests, and political interests that can hinder the communication process in decision-making, so the need for transparent and

professional communication so that the resulting policies are oriented towards public interests rather than political interests (Kehik & Kalemang, 2022).

#### IV. Conclusion

There are three main obstacles to government communication in addressing child marriage: a lack of human resources responsible for outreach; a lack of public trust in customs and culture; and a lack of communication from various relevant parties. Solutions that need to be improved include conducting outreach programs to convey information and understanding regarding the impacts of child marriage. Community-based educational forums should be created to address the specific characteristics of the community, particularly children. Human resources (HR) development should be enhanced through training for relevant stakeholders or through the recruitment of volunteers to increase the number of personnel involved in child marriage prevention programs. Furthermore, given the strong belief in customs in the community, a more effective approach based on culture and religious leaders is needed. Optimizing policies related to the Deputy Regent's circular requires long-term monitoring and evaluation. Effective communication between agencies should be improved. Leveraging the digital era on various platforms by showcasing educational, engaging, and targeted content can involve influencers, public figures, and communities who can convey messages about the dangers and risks of child marriage.

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