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Mies Grijns, Hoko Horii, Sulistyowati Irianto, and Pinky Saptandari (eds), *Menikah muda di Indonesia; Suara, hukum, dan praktik*. Jakarta: Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia, 2018, xxiii + 379 pp. ISBN 978-602-433-689-9. Price: IDR 100,000 (softcover).



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Violence against women is an issue that has persisted for centuries despite the various efforts to stop it. Women of all ages are prone to becoming the objects of violence, including sexual violence. Most of the violent acts occur in a family setting. UNICEF (2015) ranks the prevalence of child marriage in Indonesia as one of the highest in the East Asia and Pacific with 25% of married women aged 20-24 years having been married under the age of 18 (p. 5). In ASEAN context, Indonesia ranks second after Cambodia (p. 97).

This book is a compilation of eleven selected articles from a seminar that discussed child marriage in Indonesia. The articles are organized in three categories so as to view child marriage from different perspectives, namely: (a) the experiences of child brides, (b) the existence and enforcement of the laws (including the unwritten socio-cultural and religious norms) related to underage marriage, and (c) the actors behind the practice of child marriage. The Introduction highlights the findings and linkage of the various articles in each category.

The first part of this book presents case studies from West Java, Central Java, and South Sulawesi illustrating the experiences of the child brides in coping with the challenges faced in their marriages. Their stories confirm that coercing an underage girl into marriage strips them off their rights and the freedom to enjoy childhood, be educated, select their own partner, and to exercise autonomy over their body and family life.

The authors have identified various factors causing or facilitating child marriage. Poverty, socio-cultural norms, ignorance about reproductive health, interpretation of religion, and, in some cases, digital technology (arranged marriage or getting to know the future partner via social media) are assumed to be the underlying causes of underage marriage (pp. x-xv). Combined with social expectations and gender inequality, those aspects intertwine into a complex interlocking system that is difficult to breakthrough. Young girls are forced to exchange the role of a child for that of a girl-bride, take on the burden of being a wife, daughter-in-law, and a mother within less than one year, when they themselves still need to be looked after. They are perceived to be and treated as reproductive objects.

Trapped in a circle of poverty, it is quite common for the girls to marry much older men and even accept polygyny in traditional Moslem societies in which multiple marriage is tolerated. They are voiceless, invisible and powerless. As time goes by the girl-brides do develop a coping mechanism to survive. The women interviewed state that ten years after the wedding they begin to flourish. Thanks to the skills and self-confidence they gain from education (formal and informal) and social contacts, the women acquire autonomy, independence, and a status in the society.

In South Sulawesi some teenage marriages are the consequence of an unplanned pregnancy. The adolescents (girls and boys) receive no sex education or lessons in reproductive health, either at home or at school. Discussing sex is taboo and premarital sexual intercourse is not supposed to occur (pp. 25-26). This can lead to another consequence of underage marriage, a high risk of infant mortality caused by the still immature development of the young mother's reproductive organs exacerbated by insufficient ante-natal care (Chapter 4). Moreover, the marriage and pregnancy force the young couple to leave school, despite the law requiring twelve years compulsory free education for Indonesian children. This lack of education deprives the young couple of opportunities to be financially independent.

For decades activists fighting for women and children's rights in Indonesia have been demanding legal protection for women and children to protect them from aggressive behaviour, primarily domestic violence, and sexual violence, including child marriage. The government has issued a couple of laws relevant to child marriage. In 1974 the Marriage Law was approved. This allowed girls and boys, with their parents' consent, to wed at the age of 16 and 19 years old, respectively. Much later came another law, the Child Protection Law (2002) that defines a child as a person under 18 years old. The two laws, however, set different age limits in their definitions of the children's right to education and the age for marriage. This inconsistency especially affects girls, as they can be legally married at the age 16, before the completion of their compulsory education (18 years).

To complicate the matter, the Indonesian government has also included the generations-old *adat* law and Islamic law in its judicial system. This pluralistic judicial system opens the door to ambiguity and inconsistency in interpreting and implementing the laws. Anybody can interpret the marriage laws according to his/her own interests, and not necessarily in the child's best interest. For instance, instead of age, Islamic law takes a person's ability to think logically (*aqil*) and the biological/reproductive maturity indicated by menarche/menstruation (*baligh*). These *aqil-baligh* criteria can make it legal for underage girls to marry (pp. 167-168).

In many traditional societies, judges in the Islamic courts tend to use the local wisdom and religious laws in making decisions on youth marriage. When the bride is underage exceptions or dispensations are made to legitimize the marriage. The most easily accepted reason for dispensation is pregnancy or the fear of it, as extra-marital pregnancies are socially, religiously, and legally unacceptable, and abortion is forbidden. Articles in the second part of this book

illustrate how the *adat* and religious laws are implemented in various province. These *adat* loopholes include *kawin siri* (marriage witnessed by a Muslim cleric but not registered with the state) in Sulawesi, *kawin mirariq* (kidnapping a man's bride-to-be and marrying her) in Lombok, and *kawin gantung* (marrying an underage bride but sexual intercourse is postponed until she reaches maturity) sometimes practised by the Javanese.

The book's last part discusses how the marriage laws are interpreted and implemented by the authorities. The clerics (*kyai*) in the Muslim courts are authorized to make it legal for young girls to wed upon reaching maturity (*aqil baligh*). Their decision is based on Al Quran, the Hadith and the *ijma*, a consensus among Islamic scholars on certain points of the Islamic law. Quite often the court's decisions overrule the state law. At a judicial review, religious leaders have objected to the proposal to increase the marriage age for men and women. Islamic teaching and its interpretation are passed on to the youth at the Islamic schools (*pesantren*). Also reported in this book is the effectiveness of a peer approach in educating the youth on sexuality and reproductive health to prevent child marriage in Yogyakarta. The book's last chapter describes the practice of underage marriage in the colonial period found among the natives in Java, whether from the lower or high socio-economic levels. The colonial government did not intervene as it was considered local wisdom.

There seem to be significant cultural and religious hurdles to trying to curb child marriage in Indonesia. Several religious figures advocate early marriage in order to avoid the sin of adultery or fornication and to obscure one surreptitious motive for arranging child marriage: poverty. At present, the House of Representatives does not support efforts to improve the laws. It has rejected two-thirds of the 152 proposed articles on the Eradication of Sexual Violence. The present laws reduce the seriousness of sexual violence to a moral issue.

Marriage is very important to most Indonesians, Muslims in particular. The ultimate goal of Muslims is to get married and found a family. The pressure to marry is stronger on women. Every woman is expected to marry and bear children. Anomalies to these expectations suffer social sanctions. A discussion of the importance of being married is missing in this book. Women's obligation to marry might contribute significantly to the persistence of underage marriage.