

INTEGRATIVE MODEL FOR ADDRESSING EARLY MARRIAGE THROUGH A LEGAL ANTHROPOLOGY APPROACH IN BANYUWANGI REGENCY

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to: 1) identify the factors triggering early marriage in Banyuwangi Regency; 2) examine public perceptions of early marriage; and 3) develop an integrative model to address early marriage through a Legal Anthropology approach. A qualitative research method with a critical analysis approach was employed, covering research location and timeframe, approach, data sources, data collection and validation techniques, and data analysis. Finding indicate that Client-Centered Therapy (CCT) based on Legal Anthropology provides an effective alternative strategy to address persistent early marriage cases. This approach positions individuals as central agents in solution-finding while integrating cultural, customary, and legal contexts. Counselors facilitate adolescents, parents, and community leaders in expressing experiences, motivations, and social pressures underlying early marriage. The model harmonizes state law, customary law, and religious values, avoiding cultural conflicts. Its implementation has enhanced dialogue between youth and families, increased awareness of early marriage's negative impacts, and established community-based prevention mechanisms. Thus, CCT grounded in Legal Anthropology not only empowers individual decision-making but also promotes social transformation toward child protection and gender equality.

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Introductions

Early marriage remains a critical issue in Indonesia, including in Banyuwangi Regency, which has a relatively high rate of child marriages. In 2021, 1.2 million Indonesian girls married before the age of 18, primarily from rural areas and economically disadvantaged backgrounds (Central Statistics Agency, 2021). UNICEF reported that Indonesia ranks eighth in the world for the number of child marriages (UNICEF, 2020). The United Nations Population Fund (UNPF)

states that early marriage not only violates children's rights but also has long-term impacts on education, health, and the well-being of young generations (UNPF, 2024).

According to 2024 statistics, East Java recorded 285,189 marriages and 88,213 divorces, while Banyuwangi accounted for 13,742 marriages and 5,231 divorces. As of March 2025, the Religious Court of Banyuwangi received a total of 70,621 divorce cases. The high divorce rate in Banyuwangi, based on the proposer's study, is concentrated in several sub-districts, including Wongsorejo, Ketapang, Banyuwangi, Licin, Pesanggaran, Tegaldlimo, and Genteng, and is associated with early marriage.

Early marriage in Banyuwangi ranks fourth in East Java. This high incidence is influenced by several factors, particularly socio-cultural norms, where early marriage is considered part of tradition or a solution for premarital pregnancy and social pressure on young women. Research by Yunita (2024) shows that early marriage practices are still widespread, driven by family pressure and social stigma. Koetjaraningrat (2009) explains that cultural habits and norms often have stronger influence than formal regulations, especially in rural areas. Rofika (2020) notes that many parents still view child marriage as a form of protection for girls against free social interaction. Additionally, public perceptions regarding early marriage, including cultural values, religious norms, economic pressure, and lack of awareness about long-term risks and impacts, also contribute to the prevalence of early marriage in Banyuwangi.

Early marriage adversely affects children's education, health, and psychological well-being. Many adolescent girls drop out of school, experience domestic violence, and face mental stress after early marriage. Child marriage tends to reinforce the cycle of poverty and is vulnerable to divorce within the first five years of marriage. The National Population and Family Planning Agency (BKKBN) reports that child marriage is closely related to high maternal and infant mortality rates in Indonesia (BKKBN, 2021).

Based on the above, a new approach is required to address this issue: the Legal Anthropology Approach. This approach can serve as an alternative solution to bridge the gap between state law and socio-cultural norms. As Merry SE (1988) states, legal pluralism reflects the coexistence of multiple normative systems that must be recognized in policy-making. Islamic law, customary law, and state law compete in the public domain, creating complexity in implementing child protection policies. An integrative model is needed that not only incorporates legal-formal aspects but is also responsive to local social and cultural dynamics, designed participatively with the involvement of customary leaders, religious figures, government, and communities to ensure broad acceptance. Therefore, this study aims to formulate a holistic, contextual, and sustainable model for addressing early marriage.

Method

Research Location

This study was conducted in Banyuwangi Regency, focusing on five primary villages: Wongsorejo, Ketapang, Glagah, Kemiren, and Rogojampi. The selection of these locations was based on the high incidence of early marriage in the areas. Additionally, these villages maintain strong adherence to customary traditions, culture, and local wisdom, which supports in-depth analysis using a Legal Anthropology approach. This context also facilitates the development of an integrative model for addressing early marriage.

Data Sources

The research data sources consist of three categories. First, archival and documentary sources, including legal regulations, documents from the Banyuwangi Religious Court, KUA records, and relevant academic studies and research reports. Second, research informants, comprising customary leaders, elders, cultural experts, parents, early marriage participants, village officials, related government agencies, academics, and legal practitioners. Informants were selected using purposive sampling to align with the research objectives. Third, the sites of events, focusing on the five selected villages in Banyuwangi Regency.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using three primary techniques. First, in-depth interviews were conducted to obtain verbal information directly from informants using interview guides, question lists, and supporting tools such as notes, audio recordings, videos, and photographs. Interview data were then analyzed through transcription, coding, interpretation, and

thematic analysis. Second, participatory observation was carried out to observe cultural practices, social interactions, and community perceptions of early marriage. Observation data were analyzed through coding, thematic analysis, data triangulation, and interpretation. Third, document study was performed by collecting relevant documents and verifying them across sources to ensure data validity.

Data Validation Techniques

Data validation in this study employed triangulation in four forms. Data triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from interviews, observations, and documents. Theory triangulation applied various theories to compare and test the validity of findings. Method triangulation involved comparing similar data collected through different methods to enhance research validity. Lastly, researcher triangulation involved more than one researcher or evaluator to compare results and ensure data objectivity.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted using an interactive inductive analysis model. This process consists of four stages: data collection, data condensation (simplification and organization), data display (systematic presentation), and conclusion drawing/verifying. Through this approach, data obtained from interviews, observations, and document studies were processed interactively and continuously compared to produce findings that are valid, structured, and scientifically accountable.

Result and Discussions

Factors Causing Early Marriage in Banyuwangi Regency

Early marriage remains a prevalent social phenomenon in various regions of Indonesia, including Banyuwangi Regency. This practice has multiple impacts-social, economic, and psychological-particularly affecting girls. Although government regulations, such as Law No. 16 of 2019, set a minimum legal age for marriage, child marriages are still commonly found, especially in rural areas.

Based on interviews, the Head of Sidodadi Village in Wongsorejo Subdistrict, Sidik Wibisono, S.H. (Interview, July 2025), stated:

"Many residents consider early marriage a solution. For example, if a couple is dating or the girl becomes pregnant outside of marriage, the solution is to marry quickly to 'protect the family's reputation' and avoid shame."

This perspective indicates that while early marriage is seen as a solution, it often creates more complex problems. Economic factors, low educational attainment, cultural influence, and interpretations of religious values are common triggers. The consequences include higher divorce rates and reproductive health risks, which impede human resource quality. This highlights that legal regulations alone are insufficient to reduce early marriage without comprehensive efforts from multiple stakeholders.

In Banyuwangi Regency, the rate of early marriage remains high despite various preventive measures by local authorities. Research shows that child marriages are prevalent among lower-middle-income communities and in areas where traditional social norms are strongly maintained. Environmental factors, limited access to education, and cases of premarital pregnancy further increase the prevalence of child marriage. Understanding the root causes is critical to designing effective policies. Without deep insight, interventions such as minimum age regulations, educational programs, social counseling, or village-level guidance may only be symbolic and fail to address underlying causes (Dewi AP et al., 2020). Awareness programs designed for adolescents, including self-realization education and group discussions adapted to the local context, have proven effective in preventing early marriage in Wongsorejo Village (Kusuma Dewi, 2025).

a. Socio-Cultural Factors

The Head of Kemiren Village, Mohammad Arifin (Interview, August 2025), emphasized the strong role of local culture and tradition:

"Here, especially among the Osing ethnic group, there are rituals and traditions that make early marriage considered normal. Parents believe that if a child is 'ready,' they should be married. Sometimes culture is stronger than government regulations."

Banyuwangi is home to diverse ethnic groups and cultural practices, including the Osing, who have distinctive marriage traditions. Ethnographic studies show that local rituals, customs, and values in villages such as Kemiren and Alasmalang shape social expectations regarding marriage timing and procedures. In some customary contexts, early marriage may be perceived as acceptable if it aligns with local traditions. Comparative studies of Osing marriages indicate that cultural constructs of “readiness” often differ from legal age limits (Rosida, 2022).

Community norms in some Banyuwangi villages often view early marriage as normal or even desirable. Reports and cross-district studies show that public perception in some areas considers marriage under 19 years old acceptable, especially when social triggers, such as teenage pregnancy or family pressure, exist. In recent years, Banyuwangi ranks relatively high in child marriage cases in East Java, demonstrating that local norms influence official statistics (Adam et al., 2022). The normalization of early marriage is maintained through daily social mechanisms, including neighbors’ remarks, advice from customary leaders, and family consent. Field studies in Wongsorejo indicate that early marriage is perceived as a solution to “solve problems” (avoiding family shame or reducing economic burden), making the choice rational in local logic despite the unconsidered long-term impacts on adolescent rights and development (Zakiyah, 2025).

Traditional gender constructions reinforce the view that girls should marry early to protect family honor and reputation. Cultural narratives position girls as wives and mothers, shifting family priorities from education to marriage, especially when families perceive social risks, such as potential premarital pregnancy. This perspective is reinforced by social sanctions and stigma toward families whose members “violate” sexual norms or delay marriage. Consequently, early marriage is seen as a preventive measure to avoid gossip or social exclusion, effectively pressuring marriage choices despite adolescents’ psychological and emotional immaturity. Case studies in Banyuwangi confirm that maintaining family honor is often cited by parents as the primary reason for promoting child marriage (Ma’mun, 2015).

Peer environment plays a significant role. Adolescents with friends who are married or who come from communities where early marriage is normalized tend to follow the same pattern. Studies on peer influence and imitation among Banyuwangi adolescents, including during the pandemic, indicate that social norms within peer groups can accelerate marriage decisions, especially when alternative knowledge or educational/economic support is lacking (Meilia et al., 2022).

b. Economic Factors

Poverty is one of the dominant factors contributing to early marriage in Indonesia, and it is similarly significant in Banyuwangi. According to Banyuwangi BPS data, in March 2023, poverty levels remained substantial, reflecting household vulnerability, especially after the pandemic. The Head of Banjar Village, Sunandi (Interview, August 2025), highlighted family economics as a main trigger, noting: *"In our village, most early marriages come from lower-middle-income families with limited educational access. It is a cycle that is hard to break."* Household economic vulnerability often underpins decisions to marry children off at a young age. The Deputy Registrar of the Banyuwangi Religious Court, M. Nur Prehantoro, S.H., M.H. (Interview, August 2025), stated: *"Marriage dispensation requests still number in the hundreds annually. Although there has been a decline, it still reflects a major problem in the field."*

Statistics on marriage dispensation requests in Banyuwangi remain high, with 1,015 requests in 2021, 874 in 2022, 771 in 2023, and 721 in 2024 (PA Banyuwangi, 2025). Quantitative studies show a significant relationship between economic indicators—such as family income or parental occupation—and early marriage. Research using bivariate and logistic regression analysis indicates that respondents with primary/secondary education and no employment before marriage are more likely to marry young, highlighting low economic status as a significant predisposition factor.

c. Educational Factors

Low formal education is frequently associated with early marriage. High school dropout rates are a key contributor. The Welfare Section Head of Rogojampi Village (Interview, September 2025) noted: *"Children who drop out of school, especially after junior or senior high school, are often married off. Parents feel they can no longer afford schooling and see marriage as a 'solution' for the child's future."*

Reducing early marriage requires educational interventions, including expanding access to quality formal education, scholarships or financial aid for underprivileged families, reproductive health education in schools or

communities, and dropout prevention programs. Reproductive health education and awareness programs, in collaboration with schools, families, and government, are essential. The Deputy Registrar of the Banyuwangi Religious Court emphasized:

"Reproductive health education and self-awareness among adolescents are crucial. Many adolescents do not understand the consequences of early marriage. They only know about marriage but not its social or health impacts."

Community service research in Banyuwangi published in the *Journal of Health Innovation and Community Services* shows that many adolescents remain uninformed about reproductive health and ideal marriage age (Wardani EK, 2022). Comprehensive reproductive health education significantly impacts early marriage prevention. Peer education programs in Banyuwangi successfully improved adolescents' understanding, reinforcing their ability to postpone marriage until maturity.

d. Technological and Social Change Factors

The rise of social media has transformed adolescent interactions, expanding virtual spaces with limited supervision. The Head of Ketapang Village, Slamet Utomo (Interview, July 2025), stated:

"In Ketapang, early marriage is not only driven by economic factors, but negative influences from social media contribute the most. Free relationships, premarital pregnancy, and lack of parental supervision are accelerated by online interactions."

This indicates that technology can shape misleading perceptions about marriage. Adolescents often encounter social media content portraying marriage as easy and idyllic, without showing responsibilities and psychological impacts. This can lead to hasty decisions to marry without adequate preparation. Literature reviews show that social media has both positive (information and self-expression) and negative effects (access to adult content and norms encouraging permissive behavior) (Komariah, 2020). While local studies have not quantified social media's role in Banyuwangi, it is considered a potential risk factor, especially in communities where premarital pregnancy is highly stigmatized.

Premarital pregnancy is a direct trigger for early marriage in communities with strong moral and family reputation pressures. For instance, research by Alifah et al. (2021) identifies social media and free interaction as primary contributors to premarital pregnancy in several Indonesian regencies. In Banyuwangi, data from the Religious Court show that of hundreds of marriage dispensation cases, a significant portion is approved due to premarital pregnancy. Local research found that 94 out of 505 approved dispensations as of August 2023 were caused by premarital pregnancy (Rofii et al., 2021).

e. Psychological and Individual Factors

Emotional immaturity is a common psychological factor in early marriage. The Head of Ketapang Village, Slamet Utomo (Interview, July 2025), observed: *"I see adolescents seeking freedom from family. Some, especially those in restrictive or disharmonious households, see marriage as an 'escape.' They mistakenly believe marriage offers independence."*

However, they encounter greater responsibilities, with many returning to their parents due to financial and social pressures. Research in Malang Regency titled *"Emotional Maturity and Marital Readiness among Marriage Dispensation Applicants"* found a significant positive correlation between emotional maturity and readiness to marry among child marriage applicants (Adira, 2024). Emotional immaturity increases vulnerability to household conflict, psychological stress, and marital dissatisfaction.

The psychological drive for independence is often expressed when adolescents request a village-issued letter to register for marriage at KUA. The desire to marry for love or partner influence is reinforced by idealized romantic narratives from media and peer stories, portraying early marriage as part of an idealized romantic life.

Community Perceptions of Early Marriage in Banyuwangi Regency

This discussion elaborates on research findings by referring to relevant literature on social, cultural, and legal factors that shape community perceptions of early marriage. A comparative analysis between field data and previous studies provides a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of these perceptions. Specifically, this section explores how Indonesia's new legal marriage age regulation set at 19 years for both men and women affects societal views on underage marriage and the protection of children's rights.

Community understanding of early marriage in Banyuwangi encompasses a range of perspectives, from traditional acceptance to modern concerns regarding its negative impacts. Several studies indicate that cultural and religious factors continue to play a significant role in shaping community attitudes toward this practice, despite growing awareness of the accompanying health and social risks (Iriani, 2018; Syaripudin, 2021).

Banyuwangi Regency itself recorded the highest number of early marriage cases in East Java in 2019, totaling 352 cases, highlighting the urgency of examining community perceptions in the area (PA Kab. Banyuwangi, 2019). Such perceptions are often influenced by local social norms and diverse interpretations of religious teachings, creating complexity in efforts to mitigate this issue. Economic factors, low education levels, and limited access to accurate information also contribute to shaping community views and decisions regarding early marriage. Additionally, familial pressure and permissive peer environments often act as triggers, fostering the perception that marriage is the best solution to avoid more severe social consequences (Rosyidah, 2019).

This aligns with the perspective of the Head of Ketapang Village, Ahmad Umam (Interview, July 2025), who emphasizes economic issues as a dominant factor driving early marriage in his area. He stated:

"Here, many families have limited financial resources. Girls who have just graduated from junior high school sometimes cannot continue their education due to costs. Parents then think that rather than having their children idle at home, it is better to marry them off early. So, economic reasons outweigh traditional ones."

This perspective indicates that, for some members of the community, early marriage is not merely a cultural choice but a survival strategy under constrained economic conditions. From this viewpoint, marrying off a child who has dropped out of school is seen as a practical solution to reduce family burdens, making the decision more pragmatic than normative. This analysis underscores the role of village heads as local administrative leaders and policymakers, who focus on economic welfare and social stability rather than solely on law or morality. This perspective aligns with structural social theory, which emphasizes the role of local actors in balancing economic pressures and social norms (Harefa et al., 2024).

Meanwhile, the Head of Kemiren Village, M. Arifin (Interview, July 2025), highlights the strong influence of tradition and social pressure within the Using community:

"In Kemiren, traditions remain strong. If a girl often stays out late or is frequently close to boys, the family feels ashamed. So sometimes parents rush to marry off their children to protect the family's reputation. They say, 'Rather than letting neighbors talk, it's better to marry her off immediately.'"

From this account, it is evident that social norms and family reputation remain primary considerations in determining the age of marriage for children. The head of Kemiren emphasizes how family honor and community norms compel parents to marry off children, even when they are not psychologically mature. A critical analysis reveals that holding dual roles as a customary leader and public official forces him to balance the preservation of tradition with the promotion of modernization. This supports social norm theory, which posits that group pressure can lead individuals or families to make decisions that may conflict with national law or the long-term welfare of children (Padlah, 2023).

From a legal perspective, the Banyuwangi Religious Court (Interview, July 2025) provides insight into the increasing number of marriage dispensation requests in recent years. One judge explained:

"We often receive marriage dispensation requests, even for children aged 15–16. Parents usually argue that their child has been dating for a long time, or they worry that if not married immediately, undesirable events may occur. At the court, we actually want the child to continue school, so we often ask about their readiness and advise parents to consider alternatives. But in practice, family pressure is very strong."

This illustrates the tension between national legal norms and social-economic pressures in the community. The court focuses on the dilemma between law enforcement and social realities. Judges note the rise in early marriage dispensation requests but still attempt to assess the child's readiness and encourage alternative solutions. This aligns with sociological legal theory, which emphasizes that law cannot be separated from the social context in which it operates (Rofika, 2020).

Community leader Kang Purnomo (Interview, July 2025) observes that societal views on early marriage are beginning to shift, although opinions remain divided:

"From what I see, there are two groups in the community. Some say early marriage is good because children quickly take responsibility and avoid misbehavior. But others are beginning to realize the risks, fearing their children may suffer because they are not mentally mature. Many report that after marriage, there are frequent conflicts, leading to divorce. So, people are starting to rethink it, although not everyone."

This statement indicates an emerging awareness of the negative consequences of early marriage, though it has not yet become dominant. As a community figure, he emphasizes the lived experiences of residents and acts as a mediator, guiding public opinion gradually. From the perspective of community participation theory, such leaders help foster collective awareness over time (Judiasih, 2020).

From a customary perspective, Kang Usik (Interview, July 2025) explains how cultural interpretations are often misunderstood:

"According to custom, a person is considered mature when they can work and take responsibility, not just based on age. The problem is, the community often misinterprets this. Just because a child can help parents in the field, they are considered ready to marry. But in reality, the child may not be ready emotionally or mentally. So, customary interpretations are often misused."

This emphasizes that customs, which ideally guide life, are often leveraged for family convenience. Religious leader Ustaz Anam (Interview, July 2025) observes discrepancies between substantive religious teachings and community practice:

"Religion clearly teaches that marriage is good when one is ready physically and mentally. But if still a child, without income, and still in school, it is actually not the right time. Unfortunately, some use religious arguments to justify early marriage, claiming it prevents zina. The solution is not immediate marriage but educating the child to strengthen faith and morality. This is often misunderstood."

Overall, the phenomenon of early marriage in Banyuwangi arises from the intersection of economic, social, customary, and religious factors. Village heads emphasize economic and social aspects, courts focus on legal dimensions, customary leaders highlight traditional interpretations, community figures note changing dynamics, and religious leaders stress the need for deeper religious understanding. Each social role illustrates that early marriage is still perceived as a quick solution rather than a long-term investment in children's education (Hasana, 2014).

Addressing early marriage requires a multi-stakeholder approach. Village governments can strengthen education and welfare programs, courts uphold legal regulations, customary leaders reinterpret culture, religious leaders provide moral education, and community figures foster collective awareness. It can be concluded that only through cross-sectoral synergy can communities gradually reject early marriage while protecting children's rights and futures.

The Head of Banjar Village emphasizes that the village has issued Village Regulation (Perdes) No. 9 of 2020, prohibiting unregistered (siri) marriages. He stated: *"We do not tolerate siri marriages. If a couple wishes to marry, even if underage, it must go through the proper procedures at the KUA and Religious Court."* This demonstrates the village's commitment to enforcing the law and ensuring that all marriages are officially recorded.

This regulation aligns with Law No. 16 of 2019, which raises the minimum marriage age for women to 19. According to Hikmah, Vice Chair of the Martapura Religious Court, the decline in early marriage rates in the area is influenced by this regulatory change. Furthermore, the Head of Rogojampi Village explained that the village collaborates with BKKBN to prevent early marriage: *"We provide certificates stating 'Ready to Marry, Not Ready to Bear Children' to adolescents as part of education and prevention programs,"* he said. This program aims to increase adolescents' awareness of physical and mental readiness before marriage.

The regulatory change under Law No. 16 of 2019, which sets the minimum marriage age at 19 for both men and women, is a progressive step to protect children's rights and promote gender equality. However, its implementation faces significant challenges as early marriage practices remain widespread, partly due to the availability of marriage dispensation at religious courts. This highlights the gap between legal ideals and social realities. Additionally, cultural, social, and economic factors continue to perpetuate underage marriage, such as the belief that marrying daughters early preserves family honor or provides economic relief. The impacts of early marriage are multidimensional, affecting reproductive health—such as increased risks of pregnancy complications and maternal-infant mortality—educational

attainment, employment opportunities, and intergenerational poverty. Psychologically and socially, individuals married too young are often not emotionally or socially ready to assume marital responsibilities, leading to higher risks of domestic conflict and divorce. Therefore, despite normative legal reforms, socialization, education, and socio-cultural transformation remain critical to achieving the primary goal of these regulations: protecting children and fulfilling their rights.

In conclusion, early marriage in Banyuwangi Regency is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by economic, social, cultural, and legal variables. Addressing it cannot rely solely on regulatory instruments. Active and synergistic involvement from the government, religious and customary leaders, community members, and educational institutions is required to build collective awareness of the negative consequences of early marriage and to strengthen the protection of children's rights. Through sustained multi-stakeholder collaboration, a social paradigm shift can be fostered that prioritizes children's education, health, and welfare, thereby systematically and sustainably reducing early marriage practices.

An Integrative Model for Addressing Early Marriage Through a Legal Anthropology Approach in Banyuwangi Regency

Although the practice of marriage under the age of 19 has been prohibited by Law No. 16 of 2019, empirical data indicate that this phenomenon remains prevalent and even shows an increasing trend in certain regions, including Banyuwangi. In 2019, Banyuwangi Regency recorded 352 cases of early marriage, making it the area with the highest incidence in East Java. The high rate of early marriage in Banyuwangi correlates with increased risks of pregnancy complications, child stunting, and psychological disorders such as post-marriage depression.

This phenomenon illustrates the close interrelation between community social control, adolescent behavior, and weak reproductive health education. Other determinants, such as economic conditions, customary practices, and religion-based morality, also play critical roles in encouraging child marriage across regions, thereby establishing it as a socially inherited norm.

Research findings show that economic factors are the primary determinant of the high rate of early marriage in Banyuwangi (Harefa, 2024). Structural poverty often forces parents to marry off their children in hopes of alleviating family burdens, even though such practices contravene formal regulations. The Head of Banjar Village emphasized: *"We have a Village Regulation prohibiting unregistered marriages; all must go through the KUA and Religious Court, but if a family is truly struggling economically, they still find ways to marry off their children."* This demonstrates that local regulations function as preventive instruments, but their implementation is constrained by the economic realities of impoverished communities. Critically, without concrete economic interventions, such as family empowerment programs, formal rules remain largely symbolic.

Beyond economic issues, limited access to quality education reinforces the cycle of early marriage (Heri, 2020). Low participation rates in senior high school lead many girls to choose early marriage. A community leader in Rogojampi noted: *"If girls are no longer in school, parents think it is better to marry them off so someone will take care of them."* Although seen as a practical solution, this practice increases risks to reproductive health, domestic violence, and diminishes opportunities for social mobility through education (Indriani, 2025). Critically, while communities attempt to find a 'safe' path, this approach perpetuates cycles of disempowerment. Therefore, integrating formal education with community-based empowerment programs is essential to break this chain.

Religious dimensions also significantly influence community attitudes toward early marriage. Many parents believe that marrying off their children prevents moral transgressions such as premarital sexual relations or pregnancy outside of marriage. Religious leaders affirm: *"Many parents fear their children will go astray, so it is better to marry them off early, even if they are young."* This perspective highlights a moral dilemma, where religious values are used to justify early marriage but often neglect the child's psychological and physical readiness. Critically, religious education provided thus far tends to be textual and lacks contextual consideration of long-term impacts on children's lives. Consequently, progressive and inclusive religious literacy is urgently needed.

Cultural factors further sustain early marriage practices. Traditions among the Javanese, Madurese, and Sasak view early marriage of girls as a means of preserving family honor. A Using community leader in Banyuwangi explained: *"If*

girls often go out without a formal status, the community talks, so parents feel it is better to marry them off immediately." This demonstrates how customary norms can dominate over state law. Critically, public legal awareness remains low; without harmonization between customary law and national law, formal regulations will continue to confront entrenched cultural practices.

The dominance of customary norms in early marriage practices in Banyuwangi underscores the need for approaches that are not solely legal-formal but also culturally informed. Here, the integration of Client-Centered Therapy (CCT) and legal anthropology becomes relevant. CCT provides a safe space for children to voice their personal experiences without social pressure, while legal anthropology helps understand how customary norms, traditions, and religious values interact with formal law. By combining both, interventions not only emphasize compliance with state law but also accommodate cultural sensitivities. This integrative model facilitates dialogue between formal law and customary norms, enabling more effective early marriage prevention strategies that are participatory, community-based, and child-centered.

The Client-Centered Therapy (CCT) approach offers an effective alternative for addressing early marriage, emphasizing empathy and understanding without judgment (Bowen, 2003). However, interviews with village heads indicate limited safe spaces for children to express their feelings. One stated: *"Until now, cases are usually resolved through family mediation or customary leaders; children are rarely asked what they want."* This suggests that community-based counseling models are rarely implemented. Critically, without participatory spaces for children, social interventions remain top-down and fail to accommodate the primary victims' voices.

This study seeks to develop an integrative model combining CCT and legal anthropology. Through CCT, children are given the opportunity to articulate their experiences, fears, and hopes, while legal anthropology enables analysis of the interaction between customary norms and formal law. The model aims to bridge the gap between cultural practices and formal regulations. As a religious leader noted: *"If rules only emphasize prohibition, the community will look for loopholes. But if rules are accompanied by customary deliberation and religious approaches, they are more easily accepted."* This integration provides a responsive strategy by acknowledging legal, cultural, and religious authority. A critical consideration is that the model's effectiveness depends heavily on prioritizing the child's best interests over economic, customary, or moral norms.

CCT provides a counseling framework that places the client at the center, based on three principles: empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence (authenticity) (Bowen, 2003). These principles are integrated with a legal anthropology approach so that counseling considers not only psychological aspects but also socio-cultural and legal contexts affecting the client. Consequently, CCT can help address conflicts arising from the interaction between personal legal identity, customary norms, and state regulations on marriage age.

The first stage of model implementation is understanding the client in their socio-cultural-legal context. Counselors explore the client's experiences, including how their legal identity is formed and the extent to which they face conflicts between modern legal values, particularly regarding the minimum marriage age under Law No. 16 of 2019. This aligns with Merry's (2006) perspective that law should be understood as a social process negotiated in daily practice.

The next stage is the integration of legal and cultural values, where counselors facilitate dialogue between customary law, social norms, religion, and state law. This approach aims to ensure that legal awareness does not provoke cultural resistance. Bowen (2003) emphasizes that legal practices rooted in tradition are more readily accepted when connected to established religious and social norms. Thus, counseling focuses on aligning community cultural identity with national legal regulations.

The CCT counseling process in this model emphasizes exploration of experiences, self- and cultural-awareness, and legal conflict resolution. Adolescents and parents are provided space to express pressures, hopes, and concerns driving early marriage. CCT fosters critical awareness of the negative consequences of early marriage on psychological, social, and reproductive health dimensions.

The next stage involves implementing concrete early marriage prevention programs, including legal and reproductive health education, providing alternative educational and economic solutions for families, and collaboration

with customary leaders, religious leaders, and government officials. Cross-sector collaboration underscores that preventing early marriage cannot be achieved solely at the individual level, but requires holistic community engagement.

The ultimate goal of the model’s implementation is to achieve client autonomy in decision-making, alignment between personal identity and legal frameworks, and the establishment of sustainable early marriage prevention mechanisms. Therefore, CCT based on legal anthropology can be viewed not only as a psychological approach but also as a social and legal transformation strategy to strengthen child protection and promote gender equality.



Figure 1. Integrative Model of Client-Centered Therapy (CCT) Based on Legal Anthropology
Source: Primary Document, 2025

Table 1. Matrix of the Integrative Model for Early Marriage Prevention Based on Legal Anthropology in Banyuwangi Regency

Determinant Factors	Socio-Cultural-Legal Context	Intervention Approach (CCT + Legal Anthropology)	Implementation Strategy	Objective
Economy (structural poverty, family burden)	Parents marry off children to reduce economic burden, even if it contradicts	CCT: explore family & adolescent experiences related to economic pressure. Legal anthropology: understand customary norms &	- Community-based family economic empowerment programs; - Social assistance & vocational skills schemes;	Reduce economic pressure as the main driver of early marriage; ensure laws are not merely symbolic

Education (low access & participation, especially for girls)	formal regulations Children who drop out of school are considered better off married early	survival strategies of poor communities CCT: provide a safe space for children to voice educational aspirations. Legal anthropology: understand traditions that disrupt girls' education	- Legal mediation involving village leaders - Integrate schools with community programs; - Affirmative scholarships for children at risk of early marriage- Legal & reproductive health literacy in schools and pesantrens	Increase educational participation & delay marriage age
Religion (morality, fear of free association, premarital pregnancy)	Marrying children is seen as a way to prevent sin, without considering the child's readiness	CCT: counseling based on progressive religious values. Legal anthropology: connect legal regulations with religious norms	- Training religious leaders on legal & reproductive health literacy - Contextual religious education modules - Adat-religion-law deliberation forums	Foster progressive religious understanding & child protection
Culture/Customs (family honor, social status)	Marrying daughters early = maintaining family reputation	CCT: assist children & families in expressing social pressure. Legal anthropology: analyze interaction between customary norms & state law	- Legal-custom dialogue (customary leaders + law enforcement) - Revitalize child-friendly local wisdom- Community education through arts, traditions, and Using forums	Harmonize customary law & national law to reduce legitimacy of early marriage
Psychological (depression, family pressure, limited safe spaces)	Children are rarely involved in decision-making; cases resolved via family mediation	CCT: build empathy, unconditional positive regard, congruence. Legal anthropology: position children in social-legal negotiation	Community-based CCT counseling- Safe spaces for children in villages/sub-districts- Participatory reporting mechanisms (village, school, pesantren)	Empower children as legal subjects; strengthen psychological protection
Legal (Law No. 16/2019, village regulations, community resistance)	Formal law is often overridden by customary norms & economic pressure	CCT: increase legal awareness through personal dialogue. Legal anthropology: understand everyday law practices (living law)	Legal socialization based on culture & religion KUA & PA collaborate with customary religious leaders Participatory monitoring	Increase law effectiveness; regulations better accepted by the community

Overall, this matrix shows that the integrative model for early marriage prevention based on legal anthropology offers a comprehensive and participatory approach. Its main strength lies in the courage to place children at the center through CCT while simultaneously recognizing the social and cultural realities of the community through legal anthropology. The challenges faced include cultural resistance, limited economic resources, and the still limited practice of community-based counseling. However, if implemented with cross-sector support from the government, religious

leaders, customary leaders, schools, and the community, this model has great potential to become a transformative strategy in breaking the cycle of early marriage in Banyuwangi.

Conclusion

Early marriage in Banyuwangi Regency is a complex phenomenon influenced by a variety of interrelated factors. Economic factors remain one of the main causes, as families with limited financial resources often consider marrying off their children as a strategy to reduce household burdens. Education also plays a significant role; low levels of education among children and parents result in limited understanding of the risks of early marriage on the child's future, including health, psychological, and social aspects. In addition, religious and cultural factors reinforce this practice, with the belief that marrying earlier can prevent children from engaging in behavior considered to violate social norms. Legal factors also play a role, as although there are regulations regarding minimum marriage age, marriage dispensation mechanisms often provide room for the practice to continue.

Public perceptions of early marriage reveal tensions between local norms and formal regulations. Some community members still view marrying children at a young age as the best way to maintain family honor, particularly when daughters are in close contact with the opposite sex or become pregnant out of wedlock. For some parents, early marriage is not merely a personal decision but a form of social responsibility to meet community expectations. This indicates that early marriage is perceived as a mechanism to maintain social harmony, even though it has negative implications for child development.

Given this complexity, a solution-oriented approach is needed that not only emphasizes legal aspects but also addresses the psychological and cultural dimensions of the community. An integrative Client-Centered Therapy (CCT) model based on legal anthropology can be offered as an alternative. This approach focuses on empowering individuals and families to recognize their potential and needs independently while accommodating local values embedded within the community. Through CCT, adolescents and parents are given space to express their views on early marriage and are guided toward understanding that the best choices are those that protect the child's future.

Within the framework of legal anthropology, CCT can be combined with a cultural approach that positions community leaders, religious leaders, and customary authorities as mediators of change. In this way, the transformation of values regarding the ideal age for marriage is not imposed top-down but emerges from dialogue between formal legal norms and prevailing customary norms. This integrative approach is expected to reduce early marriage practices while maintaining the social cohesion that characterizes Banyuwangi.

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