Edutainment Campaigns to Address Social Norms and Perceptions about Child Marriage in Indonesia

Sector(s): Education, Gender

J-PAL office: J-PAL Southeast Asia

Sample: 261 schools

Initiative(s): Post-Primary Education Initiative (PPE)

Target group: Parents Women and girls Youth

Outcome of interest: Age of marriage Gender attitudes and norms

Intervention type: Information Social networks Norms change Edutainment

AEA RCT registration number: AEARCTR-0004804

Research Papers: Challenging Norms and Perceptions on Child Marriage among Adolescent Girls in I...

Child marriage remains a pervasive issue in several countries despite improvements in access to education and better socioeconomic conditions. Researchers conducted a randomized evaluation to test the impact of an entertainment-education short film informational campaign (i.e. edutainment campaign) designed to inform adolescent girls and parents of the costs of child marriage on the norms and perceptions about child marriage in Indonesia. The researchers also evaluated additional religious messages that stressed the importance of girls' education over child marriage. The edutainment intervention was effective in changing the perceptions of girls and parents towards child marriage.

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Research suggests that child marriage continues to be a peril in many low and middle-income countries despite improvements in access to education and socioeconomic conditions. There are several risks for girls associated with child marriage such as health complications, early pregnancy, divorce, losing social networks and connections, and lower educational attainment. One of the reasons why child marriage continues to be a challenge is the societal norms and perceptions that justify such practices. Informational and awareness campaigns have been widely used to change popular perceptions and behaviors. However, the data on the impact of such campaigns on child marriage is inadequate. One increasingly popular type of informational campaign to address norms is an edutainment intervention. This intervention presents content in a more relatable and easily acceptable manner. In addition, it presents the audience with an alternate behavior that they can aspire to emulate—potentially addressing any existing harmful norms.

Can an edutainment intervention address the norms and perceptions surrounding the costs and benefits of child marriages? Do additional religious messages aimed at promoting education included within edutainment campaigns have differentiated impacts on the norms and perceptions of adolescents and their parents?

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According to UNICEF in 2016, Indonesia ranked seventh-highest globally in terms of the number of women marrying before the age of eighteen. The incidence of child marriage exceeded twenty percent in sixteen out of the 38 districts in East Java (which is

one of the regions where the intervention takes place). Despite the high incidence of child marriages in Indonesia, most impact evaluations and systematic reviews have focused on South Asia and Africa. In contrast to the South Asian context where bride price and parents play a significant role in such decisions, parents do not necessarily exercise complete control in determining child marriage in Indonesia. In most cases, the marriage decisions involve a negotiation between the parents and adolescents, with some external societal influence. In Indonesia, strong religious views also shape some of the norms and beliefs related to child marriage. The fear of pre-marital sex among adolescents is one of the most common justifications for child marriage among the study participants.

This intervention targets 13–15-year-old junior high school girls and parents. On average, participants in this study perceived the allowable age for marriage for girls to be twenty, with the ideal age to be 22 years. They also perceived girls around seventeen to be too young to get married, probably because the legal marriageable age for women in Indonesia is nineteen years.



The actors and film crew of "My Sunshine", a short movie used as the edutainment campaign material in this intervention, about child marriage in East and Central Java

Photo: Nadia Setiabudi

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In partnership with Fatayat Nadhlatul Ulama—the female wing of Nadhlatul Ulama (NU), which is one of the biggest voluntary religious organizations in the country, and the District Offices of Education, researchers conducted a randomized evaluation to test the effectiveness of a short movie sent via WhatsApp on norms and perceptions concerning child marriage. The intervention targeted adolescent girls in East and Central Java; however, parents of adolescent girls and boys, as well as adolescent boys, also participated. The researchers randomly assigned 261 schools in six districts in two provinces into three groups:

1. ***Short film group (89 schools, 805 girls):*** Girls in this group received a short edutainment movie, along with a health message clip on Covid-19 prevention. The film focused on the costs of child marriage (such as health risks, early pregnancy, divorce, and losing connections with friends), and the benefits of delaying it (such as higher educational attainment and connections with friends). They collaborated with a documentary movie director who then hired trained actors for the short film. The actors followed a script to ensure cultural and contextual compatibility.
2. ***Short film on alternative religious views group (85 schools, 714 girls):*** Girls in this group received a modified version of the original short film that included alternative religious views along with the Covid-19 clip. This film included messages about religious views delivered by male religious clerks, who are influential in marriage decisions in this context. The religious message in the short film highlighted that marriage is not a mandatory act as per Islam, however, education is. This was an important message to reiterate that religion does not advocate for child marriage as a way to prevent sexual activity[1], and religious obligation to attain education precedes any marriage obligations.
3. ***Comparison group (87 schools, 928 girls):*** Girls in this group only watched the Covid-19 prevention clip.

Researchers measured the impact on perceptions related to child marriage by asking the participants to respond to statements related to the benefits of child marriage, risks of child marriage, and benefits of delaying marriage. Here, they also confirmed whether the participants had completed watching the film and whether they watched it alone.

Ethical Considerations

One of the biggest challenges researchers faced in designing the intervention was adding messages with an alternative religious view due to concerns about potential backlash as a result of incorrect framing. They consulted scholars working on child marriage and religion to ensure the messaging was precise. Before rolling out their full study, they also conducted focus group discussions and piloted their tools to ensure the message was received as intended.

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The edutainment campaign improved the girls' perceptions regarding the benefits of delaying child marriage and the risks associated with child marriage. In addition, the campaign including alternate religious views lowered girls' perceptions about the benefits of child marriage.

Girls' perceptions towards child marriage: The girls in the short film group had more progressive perceptions overall towards child marriage, measured by a difference of 0.113 standard deviations on the researcher's constructed perception scale than girls in the comparison group. Further analysis found that the intervention did not change their perceptions of the benefits of child marriage, but improved their perception of the risks of child marriage and the benefits of delaying marriage.

The short film on alternative religious views group also had more progressive overall perceptions towards child marriage, measured by a 0.191 standard deviation higher perception score than the comparison group. Further analysis found that the intervention led to an improved perception of the benefits of child marriage, and also improved the perception of the risks of child marriage and the benefits of delaying marriage.

Hence, the short film on alternative religious views had larger effects on girls' overall perceptions of child marriage than the short film intervention alone, driven by more progressive perceptions of the benefits of child marriage.

Parents' perceptions regarding child marriage: Both interventions improved parents' overall perceptions of child marriage (0.112 for the short film group and 0.187 for the short film on alternative religious views group). The addition of the alternative religious component didn't have different impacts on overall perceptions but had larger impacts on parents' perceptions of the risks of child marriage compared to the short film. Upon further investigation, the authors found this was due to parents' being reminded of the loss of social networks for their daughters if they married early.

Boys' perceptions regarding child marriage: The researchers test the impact of the same short film on adolescent boys. The intervention did not change boys' overall and thematic perceptions. Given that the intervention was designed for girls and their parents, the lack of impact on boys was not surprising.

Girls' perceptions regarding women's agency: Researchers tested whether the edutainment intervention changed other perceptions on an issue that was not targeted by the intervention, women's agency. They didn't find any impacts, suggesting that edutainment interventions should be carefully designed to target desired attitudes and norms.

In sum, this edutainment intervention on the costs of child marriage was effective in changing the perceptions of girls and parents. Including alternative religious views was effective in this context. The researchers suggest that policymakers designing edutainment interventions keep their target outcomes and audience in mind when designing such interventions, and consider whether and how the addition of religion may be relevant for their context. Schools may be an effective avenue for implementing these interventions.

Irhamni, Milda, and Gumilang Aryo Sahadewo. "Challenging Norms and Perceptions on Child Marriage among Adolescent Girls in Indonesia: A Randomized Experiment," August 9, 2023. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4534525.

1. *"Zina is an Islamic concept of out-of-marriage interaction between different genders, encompassing light physical touches to sexual activities. Zina is considered to be one of the most serious sins in the Islamic tradition. In the context of Indonesia, avoiding zina is one of the main drivers of child marriage".* (Irhamni and Sahadewo 2023)