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TOPO-Indigenous Parenting And Early Marriage: Exploring The Interplay Of Geography, Traditional Childrearing, And Social Norms In Rural Indonesia

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Abstract
Penelitian ini bertujuan mendeskripsikan bentuk Topo-Indigenous Parenting di Desa Cepedak, Kecamatan Bruno, Kabupaten Purworejo; mengidentifikasi faktor yang memengaruhi orang tua menikahkan anak pada usia dini; serta menganalisis interaksi antara kondisi geografis dataran tinggi dan pola asuh tradisional dalam membentuk praktik pernikahan dini. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan melalui pengamatan, wawancara, dan dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis secara deskriptif-kualitatif untuk memahami fenomena dalam konteks sosial, budaya, religius, dan ekologis masyarakat setempat. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa: (1) Topo-Indigenous Parenting di Desa Cepedak terbentuk dari perpaduan kondisi geografis pegunungan yang relatif terisolasi, keterbatasan akses pendidikan dan mobilitas sosial, serta pewarisan nilai pengasuhan tradisional yang memandang pernikahan dini sebagai pilihan wajar dan aman bagi anak perempuan. Pola asuh ini tidak hanya membentuk karakter anak, tetapi juga mereproduksi nilai sosial yang menjaga keberlangsungan kehidupan masyarakat. (2) Faktor yang memengaruhi pernikahan dini meliputi rendahnya keberlanjutan pendidikan, tekanan norma sosial dan kehormatan keluarga, pengaruh tokoh agama, keterbatasan infrastruktur, transmisi nilai lintas generasi, keterbatasan aspirasi dan role model, serta struktur ekonomi keluarga tradisional. (3) Kondisi geografis dataran tinggi memperkuat logika pengasuhan yang realistis, sehingga pernikahan dini dipandang lebih memungkinkan daripada melanjutkan pendidikan. Dengan demikian, pernikahan dini di Desa Cepedak bukan semata persoalan ekonomi, melainkan hasil interaksi kompleks antara faktor ekologis, kultural, religius, dan pola asuh tradisional

Keywords: Topo-Indigenous Parenting, pola asuh tradisional, kondisi geografis, pernikahan dini, purworejo

Abstract
This study aims to describe the forms of Topo-Indigenous Parenting practiced in Cepedak Village, Bruno District, Purworejo Regency; identify the factors that influence parents' decisions to marry off their children at an early age; and analyze the interplay between highland geographical conditions and traditional parenting practices in shaping early marriage practices. This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, and were subsequently analyzed using descriptive qualitative analysis to understand the phenomenon within the local community's social, cultural, religious, and ecological contexts. The findings indicate that: (1) Topo-Indigenous Parenting in Cepedak Village is shaped by the interplay of a relatively isolated mountainous geographical environment, limited access to education and social mobility, and the intergenerational transmission of traditional parenting values that perceive early marriage as a normal and secure option for girls. This parenting practice not only shapes children's character but also reproduces social values that sustain the community's

established way of life. (2) Factors influencing early marriage include low educational aspirations, social pressures and concerns regarding family honor, the influence of religious leaders, limited infrastructure, intergenerational transmission of values, limited aspirations and role models, and traditional family economic structures. (3) The highland geographical context reinforces a pragmatic logic of parenting, whereby early marriage is perceived as a more feasible option than pursuing further education. Thus, early marriage in Cepedak Village cannot be understood solely as an economic issue; rather, it emerges from the complex interplay of ecological, cultural, religious, and traditional parenting factors.

***Keywords**: Topo-Indigenous Parenting; traditional parenting; geographical conditions; early marriage; Purworejo.*

1. Introduction

Early marriage remains a global issue with multidimensional consequences for individuals, families, and communities, particularly in relation to social well-being, economic opportunities, reproductive health, and children's education. UNICEF data from 2023–2025 indicate that more than 650 million women worldwide were married before the age of 18, with the highest concentration reported in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. These figures demonstrate that early marriage is not merely an individual or family matter but a structural issue shaped by cultural norms, social systems, and prevailing economic conditions. In Indonesia, although the government has revised the minimum legal age of marriage through Law No. 16 of 2019, which sets the minimum marriage age at 19 for both men and women, child marriage remains prevalent. Statistics from the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS, 2022) indicate that the prevalence of child marriage reached 33.28 percent, with Central Java being among the provinces reporting relatively high rates (6.13 percent). In Purworejo Regency, particularly in Bruno District, which is located in a mountainous area characterized by limited access to education, healthcare, and social mobility, the practice of early marriage has persisted across generations.

A growing body of cross-national and local research demonstrates that the causes of early marriage are considerably more complex than economic disadvantage alone. One important factor is the culture of family honor. In Nepal and Pakistan, for instance, girls are often married at an early age to protect family reputation, avoid social stigma associated with premarital relationships, or prevent the negative labeling of women who remain unmarried beyond the socially expected age (ICRW, 2013; Nepal Demographic and Health Survey, 2016). Similar phenomena have been observed in rural areas of Indonesia, where women who reject marriage proposals or remain unmarried for too long may be labeled perawan kasep (literally, "an unmarried woman considered too old to marry"). Consequently, marrying daughters at an early age may be perceived as a means of protecting family dignity and social standing (Putri & Wulandari, 2023).

The authority of religious and customary leaders also plays a significant role in shaping parental decisions regarding early marriage. In many Indonesian communities, advice from kiai or customary leaders may carry greater social authority than formal government regulations, thereby limiting the effectiveness of state interventions aimed at preventing child marriage (Sari & Kurniawan, 2024). A similar pattern has been documented in Nepal and Pakistan, where religious legitimacy is sometimes invoked to justify marriage at a young age, particularly when marriage is understood as a religious obligation that should not be delayed or obstructed (Hussain & Mahmood, 2020).

Limited life opportunities and the scarcity of successful female role models may further reinforce the practice of early marriage. In Nepal, Demographic and Health Survey data indicate that women who completed education through Grade 10 had a substantially lower risk of early marriage than those who had never attended school (ICRW, 2013). A comparable situation can be observed in rural areas of Indonesia, where limited access to education and the lack of visible female role models may lead early marriage to be perceived as a realistic and socially acceptable pathway for girls (Susanti & Prasetyo, 2022).

Early marriage is also sustained through the intergenerational transmission of values and experiences. Parents who married at a young age and perceive their own experiences as having been "perfectly fine" may be more likely to reproduce similar patterns in the lives of their children. Studies in Nepal and Indonesia have identified intergenerational continuity in early marriage practices, which makes the cycle difficult to break (Fricke, 2001). In addition, traditional agrarian family structures may influence parental perceptions of daughters' economic roles. In some contexts, daughters may be perceived as a financial burden before marriage, while marriage is viewed as transferring their economic responsibility to the husband (Kumar & Dewi, 2021).

The complexity of these factors is also evident in Bruno District, Purworejo Regency, where the relatively isolated mountainous environment has contributed to distinctive forms of local childrearing and parenting practices. Bruno is situated in a hilly region bordering Wonosobo Regency, where rural communities maintain strong religious orientations, reflected in the high intensity of pengajian (Islamic religious study gatherings) and other religious activities. However, Cepedak Village, one of the villages in Bruno District, has been identified as an area with a relatively high incidence of early marriage in Purworejo. This phenomenon points to a potential gap between symbolic religiosity and social practices, particularly in relation to parenting patterns and parental decision-making concerning children's marriage.

Previous studies have examined early marriage from a variety of perspectives. First, demographic and public health studies (UNICEF, 2021) have emphasized structural factors such as poverty, low educational attainment, and limited access to information and healthcare services. Second, cultural and anthropological studies (Putri & Wulandari, 2023; Fricke, 2001) have highlighted the influence of social norms, customary practices, and cultures of family honor in shaping parents' decisions to marry their children at an early age. Third, studies focusing on religion (Sari & Kurniawan, 2024; Hussain & Mahmood, 2020) have demonstrated how permissive interpretations of marriageable age may provide religious legitimacy for the continuation of early marriage practices. In addition, several recent studies (Wa Ode Wati Nurbaena, 2020; Maelia Unayah et al., 2021; Ulfa Mulyani et al., 2022; Zulham Hamidan Lubis & R. Nunung Nurwati, 2019) have examined the consequences of early marriage for parenting practices and the quality of childcare.

However, limited attention has been given to the relationship between the topological characteristics of a region such as highland environments, geographical isolation, and restricted socioeconomic access and indigenous or intergenerational traditional parenting practices, particularly in relation to how their interaction shapes parental decisions regarding early marriage. This constitutes the research gap and provides the basis for the novelty of the present study. To address this gap, the study introduces the concept of Topo-

Indigenous Parenting as an analytical framework that integrates ecological and cultural dimensions of parenting within the local context of Bruno District, Purworejo Regency.

Building on this research gap, the present study seeks to address the following research questions: (1) How does Topo-Indigenous Parenting manifest itself within the community of Cepedak Village? (2) What factors influence parents in Cepedak Village to marry off their children at an early age, particularly in relation to economic, religious, cultural, and geographical dimensions? (3) How does the interaction between the highland geographical environment and intergenerational traditional parenting practices shape the practice of early marriage?

Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of scholarship in Islamic early childhood education and ecocultural theory by examining parenting practices within a localized mountainous context. Practically, the findings are expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics underlying early marriage and to inform more context-sensitive policies, family education initiatives, and prevention programs, particularly in rural communities characterized by strong religious orientations but persistent problematic social practices.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to gain an in- depth understanding of the phenomenon of early marriage within the social, cultural, and geographical context of Cepedak Village, Bruno District, Purworejo Regency. A case study design was selected because it enables researchers to examine a phenomenon intensively and contextually within a specific geographical and social setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018).

The study was conducted in Cepedak Village because of its distinctive characteristics, including a relatively isolated mountainous environment, strong local traditions, and the persistence of early marriage practices. The research was carried out from February 1 to May 20, 2026, covering the stages of research preparation, data collection, data analysis, and report writing.

Research participants were selected using purposive sampling, in which informants are deliberately selected based on criteria relevant to the research focus (Sugiyono, 2020). The participants consisted of four groups: (1) Parents who had married off their children at an early age, as the primary actors involved in decision-making concerning their children's marriage;

(2) Religious leaders, who contribute to providing normative legitimacy through religious interpretations and practices; (3) Community leaders, who play a role in maintaining local traditions and customary practices; and (4) Adolescents who had entered into early marriage, as individuals who directly experience its psychological, social, and economic consequences.

The number of informants was not predetermined rigidly but was guided by the principle of data saturation, namely the point at which additional data no longer generated significant new findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For the parent and adolescent groups, the study focused on one case that met the predetermined criteria and was recommended by village authorities.

The object of the study was the phenomenon of Topo-Indigenous Parenting, defined in this study as a form of traditional parenting shaped by the interaction between the relatively

isolated mountainous environment and locally inherited intergenerational parenting practices, particularly in relation to early marriage in Cepedak Village.

Data were collected through three primary techniques: (1) Semi-structured in-depth interviews with selected informants to explore their perspectives, experiences, interpretations, and decision-making processes concerning parenting and early marriage; (2) Direct observation of the social, cultural, and geographical contexts of the community, including religious activities, family interactions, and everyday social practices; and (3) Documentation, involving the collection and examination of relevant written records and archival materials, including village records and available early marriage statistics.

Data analysis followed the interactive model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), consisting of three interconnected stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The collected data were selected, organized, condensed, and presented in narrative and matrix forms before being interpreted to identify relevant patterns, relationships, and meanings.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the study employed source and technique triangulation by comparing information obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation and by examining the consistency of information across different participants. In addition, member checking was conducted by confirming preliminary findings with selected informants to ensure that the resulting interpretations accurately reflected their experiences and perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3. Results and Discussion

This study found that Topo-Indigenous Parenting in Cepedak Village, Bruno District, Purworejo Regency, represents a parenting pattern shaped by the interaction of the mountainous geographical environment, local cultural values, and the collective social structure of the community. This parenting pattern emphasizes independence, responsibility, obedience to parents, religiosity, and the importance of preserving family honor. In everyday life, children are accustomed to participating in domestic tasks and family economic activities from an early age. Such involvement is not merely perceived as providing assistance but also serves as a process of social learning through which children develop a work ethic and preparedness for adult life.

In general, parenting in Cepedak Village is not carried out solely by nuclear parents but also involves extended family members and the broader social environment. Grandparents, religious leaders, and community leaders contribute to guiding, supervising, and shaping children's behavior. This indicates that parenting takes place within a framework of collective parenting, in which the formation of children's character is supported by communal involvement. Within this context, social and religious values are transmitted through multiple layers of family and community relationships.

One important finding of this study is that families in Cepedak Village continue to integrate formal education with religious education. Children are not only enrolled in formal schools but are also encouraged to participate in madrasah education and religious activities within the local community. However, when children enter adolescence, particularly girls, family decisions often tend to shift toward early marriage. Several reasons identified by the participants include concerns about safety, adherence to tradition, arranged marriage, school discontinuation, and pregnancy outside marriage. One participant, Safari, explained that early marriage was motivated by "security, tradition, and arranged marriage," while another

participant, Zuhri, added that it was also influenced by "the discontinuation of education, finding a suitable partner, and pregnancy outside marriage."

The factors influencing early marriage practices in Cepedak Village are complex and mutually interconnected. First, limited educational continuation emerged as one of the most visible factors. The case of Rini illustrates that after completing junior secondary school, she decided not to continue her education and instead worked outside the village. She eventually married at the age of 17. This case indicates that school discontinuation shortens the transition period from adolescence to adulthood and increases the likelihood of early marriage. In this context, education functions as a protective factor that can delay marriage.

Second, social norms and family honor exert a strong influence. Parents feel compelled to protect the reputation of the family, particularly in relation to the behavior and social relationships of their daughters. Concerns about premarital relationships and perceived sexual misconduct may lead parents to view marriage as a strategy for social protection. Third, religious legitimacy can further reinforce such decisions. Advice from religious leaders emphasizing the importance of maintaining moral conduct is sometimes interpreted as encouragement to marry at an earlier age. Fourth, limited access and infrastructure restrict the mobility and life opportunities of adolescent girls, making marriage appear to be the safest and most realistic option. Fifth, intergenerational transmission of values occurs when parents who themselves married at a young age tend to reproduce similar patterns in the lives of their children. Sixth, the limited availability of successful female role models outside the village contributes to restricted aspirations among girls. Seventh, traditional family economic structures may lead daughters to be perceived primarily in terms of domestic responsibilities, with marriage viewed as a transition in which those responsibilities are transferred to the husband's household.

These findings demonstrate that Topo-Indigenous Parenting in Cepedak Village is not simply a form of traditional parenting but rather the outcome of a structured ecological and cultural adaptation. The relatively isolated mountainous environment contributes to the development of parenting practices that are pragmatic, protective, and oriented toward community and family survival. Within such a social context, early marriage is often understood as a safe solution that conforms to community values and prevailing social expectations. Consequently, parental decisions to marry children at an early age cannot be separated from the intersection of structural constraints, social pressures, and the internalization of cultural values.

From a broader analytical perspective, this phenomenon demonstrates that early marriage in Cepedak Village is not merely a consequence of economic hardship or low educational attainment but also an outcome of social constructions legitimized through cultural and religious frameworks. Although Indonesian legislation establishes 19 as the minimum legal age of marriage, practices at the community level indicate that local norms may continue to exert stronger social influence than formal regulations. This tension between formal law and social practice suggests that behavioral change cannot be achieved through regulatory approaches alone. Instead, it requires culturally responsive interventions involving family education, community engagement, and the active participation of religious and community leaders.

From the perspective of Islamic Early Childhood Education, these findings highlight the importance of parenting during the early stages of children's development in shaping their long-term life orientations. When parenting places greater emphasis on protecting girls' moral

reputation through early marriage than on strengthening education, autonomy, and future aspirations, girls' opportunities for personal development become increasingly constrained. Therefore, the findings underscore the importance of developing context-sensitive family education programs, particularly in rural communities with similar social, cultural, and geographical characteristics.

Theoretically, this study reinforces the argument that parenting practices cannot be separated from their ecological and cultural contexts. Topo-Indigenous Parenting in Cepedak Village demonstrates how the physical environment, social structures, and religious values interact to shape how families raise children and make consequential decisions concerning their lives. In this regard, the study contributes to a broader understanding of early marriage as a phenomenon that does not occur in isolation but is embedded within a wider social, cultural, ecological, and religious system.

4. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Topo-Indigenous Parenting in Cepedak Village, Bruno District, Purworejo Regency, represents a parenting pattern shaped by the interaction between geographical constraints, strong local cultural values, and a cohesive community social structure. This parenting pattern functions not only as a means of shaping children's character but also as a mechanism for reproducing social values that sustain the continuity of the local community. Therefore, parenting practices in Cepedak Village need to be understood contextually, as variations in parenting practices reflect the diverse ecological and social environments in which communities live.

The factors influencing parents' decisions to marry their children at an early age are complex and interconnected. Limited educational continuation, social pressure and concerns regarding family honor, religious legitimacy provided by religious leaders, restricted access to infrastructure, intergenerational transmission of values, limited aspirations and role models, and traditional family economic structures constitute important factors contributing to the persistence of early marriage. These findings demonstrate that early marriage is not merely an individual decision but rather the outcome of collective pressures and internalized social values that operate systematically within community life.

The phenomenon of early marriage in Cepedak Village also demonstrates that geography functions not merely as a physical setting but as a factor that contributes to shaping a pragmatic and protective logic of parenting. Within this context, early marriage may be perceived as a feasible and socially acceptable option, particularly when access to education and opportunities for social mobility are limited. Therefore, efforts to prevent early marriage should not rely solely on legal and regulatory approaches but should also incorporate culturally responsive and educational strategies capable of bridging the gap between formal legal norms and the social realities of local communities.

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