

Self-Concept of Adolescent Girls Who Dropped Out of School Due to Early Marriage

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Abstract: This study analyzes the self-concept of adolescent girls who dropped out of school due to marrying at a young age. The research method employed a qualitative phenomenological approach, using in-depth interviews and observations involving three subjects in Rejeni Village, Krembung District, Sidoarjo Regency. The findings revealed that early marriage influences their self-concept in various aspects, including self-identity, behavior, self-evaluation, body image, ethics, family roles, and social roles. The respondents faced significant challenges in adjusting to their new responsibilities, such as becoming a wife and mother, which affected their self-confidence, academic opportunities, and social adaptation.

1 INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of school dropouts is still prevalent in Indonesia. According to the Central Statistics Agency (Mufid, n.d.), the number of dropouts from elementary to senior high school reached 29.21% out of 30.2 million children in 2023. The highest dropout rate is found at the senior high school level, with 23.78% of boys and 21.61% of girls dropping out. The highest dropout rate occurs in vocational high schools (SMK), reaching 0.28% in the 2023/2024 academic year (Irfan, 2024). Internationally, there are approximately 258.4 million adolescents out of school (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2019). Based on data from India's Integrated Regional Education Information System, the dropout rate at the secondary school level reached 17% (Krisnan, 2021). Many factors cause adolescents

to drop out of school, one of which is early marriage (Fuadi & Ripursari, 2022).

According to (UNICEF Indonesia, 2022), the child marriage rate in Indonesia decreased from 10.35% in 2021 to 9.23% in 2022. West Nusa Tenggara ranks first with a proportion reaching 17.32% (Fatika, 2024). Internationally (UNICEF, n.d.), the highest child marriage rates are in West and Central Africa, where nearly 4 out of 10 young women marry before the age of 18, with figures in East and Southern Africa at 32%, South Asia at 28%, and Latin America and the Caribbean at 21% in 2022. According to (Syeda Zainab Shabbar, Asma Manzoor, 2022), early marriage is widespread in Pakistan, affecting 72% of girls and 22% of boys. In Uganda, early marriage is estimated to reach 49% (Otim, 2019).

Even in modern times, the phenomenon of early marriage is still commonly found in society, influenced by several factors (Fuadi & Ripursari, 2022), including cultural factors such as traditional beliefs and the fear that daughters will not marry, economic factors such as poverty, and social factors such as peer pressure, environment, excessive freedom, and lack of knowledge (Tembo, 2023). Socially, those who marry young are often viewed negatively by society—they are criticized and looked down upon, both verbally and non-verbally, including their families (Suryani & Kudus, 2022). This negative perception causes them to withdraw from social interaction due to shame and being judged or blamed (Vionita, 2020). However, not all young women who drop out of school and marry young withdraw socially—some remain unaffected by negative societal views (Zulaika et al., 2022).

According to research by (Lestari et al., 2022), self-concept is formed and developed based on experience, environmental interpretation, evaluations from others, and personal self-assessment. As noted by (Nisa, Lissa Ahlun & Budianingsih, 2019), self-concept becomes essential during adolescence as individuals experience rapid physical changes that can alter their self-knowledge. Someone with a strong or positive self-concept tends to exhibit high levels of optimism and confidence about the future (Biagi & Uyun, 2023). Self-concept serves as a foundation for planning one's future (Nisa, Lissa Ahlun & Budianingsih, 2019). A clear self-image can help individuals recognize and develop their potential (Harahap & Pranungsari, 2020).

In research by (Pratiwi & Handayani, 2020), two adolescent subjects from broken families still managed to develop a positive self-concept through

self-awareness, self-expectations, and self-evaluation. In another study by (Martin & Maheswari, 2022), adolescents' self-concepts vary across both positive and negative domains. According to (Lichner et al., 2021), self-concept development in adolescents is necessary across all dimensions to maintain life balance and achieve appropriate goals. This aligns with (Farah et al., 2019), who state that a good self-concept fosters positive self-perception, encouraging motivation to behave positively, leading to self-acceptance, realistic future goals, and good social relationships (Maryam, 2022).

Most of the challenges adolescents face revolve around themselves. Today, the "self" is shaped through self-concept (Lestari et al., 2022). According to Zhan Smith & Wethington (Tayo et al., 2022), self-concept is a crucial component of the overall identity system, consisting of identity relations, anxiety, melancholy, stress, and defense mechanisms. Burns (Farah et al., 2019) explains that self-concept includes both positive and negative dimensions. A positive self-concept is associated with positive self-evaluation, such as self-worth and acceptance, while a negative self-concept is linked with negative self-evaluation, such as self-hatred and inferiority. William H. Fitts (1971) (Dewi, 2021) stated that self-concept is a key aspect of the individual, acting as a frame of reference for interaction with the environment. Calhoun and Acocella (Saputro & Sugiarti, 2021) describe self-concept as one's self-image, including knowledge, expectations, and evaluations of oneself.

The self-concept of adolescent girls who drop out of school due to marriage is often influenced by role changes—becoming a wife and mother (Nasution, 2019). These changes can affect how they

assess their abilities, values, and self-worth (Sari, D. U., & Khoirunnisa, 2021).. When education is discontinued, they lose the space to optimally develop themselves (Istiqomah & Amin, 2021). Marital issues may lead partners to feel dissatisfied with their self-concept in their marital roles (Salsabilla, 2021). Couples who marry young and feel unprepared to fulfill family responsibilities may suffer in terms of self-concept (Asmita et al., 2021).

Research by (Lorinda et al., 2023) found that many young girls and boys who divorce early tend to have negative self-concepts, including perceptions of physical decline after marriage. (Asmita et al., 2021) also found that adolescents who choose to marry young based on their own decisions—without considering advice from parents and family—may reflect negative self-concepts. Based on this background, the researcher aims to explore more deeply the self-concept of adolescent girls aged 15–16 who dropped out of school due to early marriage.

2 METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research method with a phenomenological approach (Nasir et al., 2023). This approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences, perceptions, and meanings given to self-concept by adolescent girls who decided to marry at a young age, as obtained through interviews and observations (Hardiyati & Ahmad, 2023). According to Taylor and Bogdan (1984:5) (Mirna, 2019), qualitative research is research that produces descriptive data in the form of spoken or written words and observable behavior from the people being studied.

The subjects of this study were adolescent girls who dropped out of school due to marriage and were located in Rejeni Village, Krembung District, Sidoarjo Regency (Wijaya & Muslim, 2021). The researcher selected three (3) adolescent girls who dropped out of school or had a low level of education and decided to get married. The researcher ensured that the participants gave informed consent to voluntarily participate in this study. Data collection techniques were carried out through in-depth semi-structured interviews and observation (Zakiyyah & Astrella, 2023). Interviews were conducted in a closed room with guaranteed confidentiality. The researcher created a comfortable atmosphere to encourage participants to share their experiences without pressure. The researcher transcribed the interviews verbatim and performed coding (Novia, 2022). Furthermore, to analyze the data, the researcher used coding techniques or other qualitative methods. In qualitative research, meanings obtained from interviews can be diverse. These meanings can be derived through interpretation of the underlying meaning in the interviews or directly from the interview transcripts (Wimona & Loisa, 2022).

3 RESULT

Based on the responses given by the three subjects, several themes were identified, as shown in the table below. These themes relate to the self-concept before and after the adolescent girls decided to drop out of school due to marriage.

Aspect	Subject 1	Subject 2	Subject 3
Identity Self	Aware of her new role as a wife	Accepting life changes	Feels looked down upon
Behavior Self	Performs the duties of a wife and mother	Maintains mutual care with husband	Becomes a single parent
Judging Self	Lost the chance for academic potential	Feels inferior compared to others	Lost career potential
Physical Self	Feels her body is always small	Thinks she is imperfect	Thinks her body has changed
Moral-Ethical Self	Upholds manners toward in-laws	Appreciates and respects in-laws	Prioritizes etiquette toward in-laws
Personal Self	Focuses on her small family	Demonstrates her personal skills	Takes the role of both mother and father
Family Self	Acts as wife and mother	Helps husband earn money	Earns a living independently
Social Self	Adapts to adult society	Reduces interaction with neighbors	Maintains same interaction with neighbors

Starting with identity self, the three informants revealed whether there were significant differences in themselves before and after marriage. Two informants said they used to enjoy playing, hanging out, and attending concerts before marriage because they believed their partners would secure their futures. After marriage, both informants spent more time at home raising their children, doing household chores, and occasionally helping their husbands with work and home responsibilities. One informant, who dropped out of school due to "married by accident" (MBA), expressed regret for disappointing her parents and feeling looked down upon by society. This change indicates that marriage has had a significant impact on their self-identity, as they began to adapt to new roles.

"At that age, I had to take care of the baby on my own, especially after I gave birth and my husband left me, so I really had to handle everything myself and work too..."

"After marriage, I had to take care of the child, the husband, and house chores like washing clothes and cooking for my husband."

The same pattern can be seen in the **behavior self** aspect. Informants 1 and 2 behaved like mature women after marriage, while informant 3 had to become a single parent and breadwinner. All three had new responsibilities that replaced their previous school routines. They changed their behavior to adapt to new life circumstances. These adjustments demonstrate a shift in priorities.

In the **judging self** aspect, they evaluated their abilities and potential. All three felt they had lost opportunities for academic development, often accompanied by feelings of inferiority, especially when comparing themselves to peers who remained in school or succeeded outside of marriage.

"Actually, I wanted to pursue higher education."

“It’s difficult to find a job now, even with a high school diploma.”

In the **physical self** aspect, all informants expressed negative self-perceptions. Body image reflects how adolescents see themselves physically. They were often dissatisfied with changes in their bodies caused by pregnancy, domestic workload, or feeling unable to maintain their previous appearance. These perceptions were influenced by social pressure and their new family roles.

“My body has always been small, and it hasn’t changed after marriage—still small.”

“My body is the same before and after marriage.”

“After marriage, I gained a lot of weight.”

In terms of **moral-ethical self**, they focused on social norms and ethics, such as respecting in-laws, maintaining household harmony, and behaving politely. These values represent their adaptation to societal expectations for a wife and mother. This shows how moral responsibilities added extra pressure during their adjustment.

“We must be polite, and speak gently.”

“We should respect others, greet them, maintain social ties.”

“My in-laws and husband’s relatives are nice. They always support what I’m going through.”

In the **personal self** aspect, the informants revealed how they made decisions based on family needs. There was a need to redefine their sense of self,

dominated by family responsibilities. Personal choices such as education, hobbies, or other interests were often set aside in favor of their roles as wives or mothers. This reflects the sacrifices they made for their families. Their focus shifted from personal needs to family obligations.

“After getting married, I had to take care of my child and my husband...”

“After giving birth, my husband left, so I really had to take care of the baby myself and work at the same time...”

The **family self** aspect showed how the informants saw their roles within the family. Their statements largely aligned with those in the personal self aspect. Their role shifted to being the core of household responsibility, supporting the husband and ensuring the household ran smoothly. They tried to maintain family stability, even under pressure, treating family duties as part of their new identity.

As for the **social self**:

“Hanging out with friends became limited because of my different status.”

“Now it’s reduced compared to before, but I still try to maintain it.”

“The surrounding community didn’t really treat me differently.”

In the social domain, they attempted to adapt to adult environments but may have felt isolated from their peers. Their interactions were more limited and focused on neighbors or extended family. These

interpretations show that the self-concept of adolescent girls who dropped out of school due to early marriage tends to be shaped by role pressure and social expectations. Some positive aspects remain, such as adaptability, but overall, they face major challenges in balancing identity, social roles, and family responsibilities. This adjustment is crucial to their new life after marriage.

4 DISCUSSION

This study shows that the self-concept of adolescent girls who dropped out of school due to early marriage undergoes major changes in various aspects. They tend to focus on their new roles as wives and mothers, bearing greater responsibilities compared to before marriage. This is supported by the study of (Lorinda et al., 2023), which shows that early marriage often causes adolescents to lose the opportunity to reach their full potential. Self-concept is influenced by social expectations and the responsibilities they carry within the family.

Body image becomes one of the key indicators in the formation of self-concept. This indicates a negative perception of the physical changes experienced after marriage. Dissatisfaction with the body is often influenced by social pressure and the new roles in the family. Research by (Zulaika et al., 2022) confirms that physical changes due to early marriage and pregnancy often impact how adolescents perceive themselves. This dissatisfaction becomes one of the aspects that influences the overall self-concept.

All three informants felt they had lost academic opportunities and personal potential. This was often followed by feelings of inferiority. They compared themselves with peers who continued their education, which led to dissatisfaction with themselves. These findings support the study by (Martin & Maheswari, 2022), which states that self-evaluation among adolescents who marry early tends to be negative due to the limited opportunities for self-development. This shows that early marriage has a significant impact on their potential and self-confidence.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The self-concept of adolescent girls who drop out of school due to early marriage tends to undergo significant changes. They face major challenges such as loss of academic opportunities, social pressure, and increased responsibilities in their new roles as wives and mothers. Early marriage often negatively affects self-identity, behavior, and the evaluation of personal potential. Adaptation to social and moral norms also creates additional pressure, contributing to the development of a less optimal self-concept. As a result, individuals are more likely to experience family problems, leading to a decline in their overall mental well-being.

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