

## **Local Policy Implementation on Early Marriage Education Among High School Students In Ternate City**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Early marriage remains a significant social issue in Ternate, Indonesia, as indicated by data from several relevant institutions showing consistently high rates. This condition prompted the local government to issue Mayor Regulation (Perwali) No. 2 of 2021 concerning the prevention of early marriage. This study aims to analyze the implementation of this policy, particularly among senior high school students in Ternate City. A qualitative research approach was employed, utilizing data collection techniques such as observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation review. The study involved four key informants and was complemented by questionnaire data from 100 senior high school students. The findings reveal that the implementation of the mayoral regulation has not been carried out optimally. Limited dissemination and lack of effective communication strategies have resulted in low levels of awareness among students regarding the existence and objectives of the policy. The questionnaire results further confirm that most students are unfamiliar with Mayor Regulation No. 2 of 2021, indicating weak policy outreach and engagement. This study highlights the need for more comprehensive policy implementation strategies, particularly through educational institutions and community-based approaches, to enhance awareness and effectiveness. Strengthening coordination among stakeholders and improving policy communication are essential to achieving the intended outcomes of early marriage prevention.

**Keywords:** *Policy Implementation; Early Marriage; Local Regulation; Public Policy; Ternate City*

**Contribution/Originality:** This study contributes to the public policy literature by analyzing the implementation of Mayor Regulation No. 2 of 2021 on early marriage prevention in Ternate City. Its originality lies in examining the gap between policy formulation and implementation among high school students, while applying collaborative governance theory to explain challenges in policy dissemination and stakeholder coordination.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Public policy concerning human resource development in Indonesia is closely related to marriage, birth rates, and mortality rates, all of which contribute to population growth that is increasingly difficult to control. The Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection of the Republic of Indonesia, which is primarily responsible for

safeguarding children's welfare, has emphasized this issue through five presidential priority directives. One of these priorities specifically addresses the problem of early marriage among Indonesian children.

Marriage is an essential aspect of human life. Beyond serving as a foundation for family formation, marriage is also a natural means for fulfilling human biological and emotional needs. However, the increasing prevalence of child marriage has prompted the government to establish policies regulating the minimum legal age for marriage. This is reflected in Article 7 paragraph (1) of Law No. 16 of 2019 on Marriage, which amended Law No. 1 of 1974 on Marriage. The revised law raised the minimum marriage age for both men and women from 16 to 19 years.

The issue of child marriage has become a central concern across Indonesia, prompting both central and local governments to prioritize strategic interventions to address this critical challenge. Early marriage is also explicitly included in the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly the commitment to eliminate harmful practices such as child, early, and forced marriage.

One of the regions facing a growing and concerning trend of early marriage is Ternate. Data collected and analyzed from various institutions consistently indicate that the prevalence of early marriage in Ternate remains in the high category. This situation poses serious social challenges within the community. Data spanning from 2000 to 2022 show an increasing trend in early marriage cases, as evidenced by statistics from Statistics Indonesia (BPS), the Regional Population and Family Planning Office (DPPKB), and marriage dispensation cases recorded by the Religious Court of Ternate.

Data from Statistics Indonesia (BPS) for Ternate provide detailed insights into the widespread occurrence of early marriage across districts and municipalities in North Maluku, offering a comparative basis for this study. Furthermore, field data from relevant institutions illustrate the development of early marriage cases in Ternate over the past three years (2020–2022), including data from Statistics Indonesia (BPS) Ternate on the percentage of the population aged 10 years and above by age group and marital status (2019–2021), which provides a comprehensive overview of the situation at both the district/city level, particularly in Ternate.

Despite the existence of regulatory frameworks, early marriage continues to persist, indicating a significant gap between policy formulation and its implementation, particularly in regions such as Ternate City.

**Table 1. Projected Number of Households by Regency/City in North Maluku (2019–2021)**

Region / Regency-City	2019	2020	2021
West Halmahera	25,350	25,756	28,858
Central Halmahera	10,965	11,261	11,407
Sula Islands	21,368	21,791	21,856
South Halmahera	45,696	46,379	48,891
North Halmahera	40,115	40,865	41,391
East Halmahera	20,515	21,022	20,056

Region / Regency-City	2019	2020	2021
Morotai Island	13,371	13,698	15,111
Taliabu Island	11,012	11,088	12,311
Ternate City	49,527	50,604	43,738
Tidore Islands	21,453	21,656	24,568
North Maluku (Total)	259,372	264,120	268,187

Data from Statistics Indonesia indicate that the total number of households in North Maluku increased steadily from 259,372 in 2019 to 268,187 in 2021, reflecting overall demographic expansion (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2022). At the regional level, most districts show a consistent upward trend in household formation, which is generally associated with population growth and family establishment patterns (BKKBN, 2020).

However, Ternate City presents a distinct and analytically important pattern. While the number of households increased from 49,527 in 2019 to 50,604 in 2020, it declined significantly to 43,738 in 2021. This fluctuation suggests the presence of underlying socio-demographic dynamics rather than a mere statistical anomaly. One plausible explanation lies in the persistence of early marriage practices, which remain prevalent in the region (UNICEF, 2021; UNFPA, 2020).

From a demographic perspective, early marriage tends to accelerate household formation at younger ages, contributing to a temporary increase in the number of households. This phenomenon is consistent with findings that early marriage often leads to earlier family establishment, despite limited economic readiness (Field & Ambrus, 2008). However, such households are typically more vulnerable, with higher risks of economic instability and lower educational attainment (Parsons et al., 2015; World Bank, 2017).

The decline observed in 2021 may therefore indicate household instability, including economic pressures, delayed independence, or household recomposition (e.g., young couples returning to extended family structures). These dynamics align with broader evidence that early marriage does not necessarily contribute to sustainable development outcomes, but instead perpetuates cycles of poverty and social vulnerability (UNICEF, 2021; World Bank, 2017).

From a policy perspective, the persistence of early marriage in Ternate highlights the limited effectiveness of local regulatory frameworks, including Mayor Regulation No. 2 of 2021. According to policy implementation theory, the success of a policy is determined not only by its formulation but also by factors such as communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure (Edwards III, 1980). Similarly, Mazmanian and Sabatier (1983) emphasize that effective implementation requires clear objectives, strong institutional support, and target group compliance.

In this context, the low level of awareness among adolescents regarding the regulation indicates weak policy dissemination and insufficient engagement strategies. Consequently, demographic indicators such as household formation may continue to reflect underlying social issues rather than genuine developmental progress. This

underscores the need for more integrated and participatory approaches to policy implementation, particularly through educational institutions and community-based interventions, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals' commitment to eliminating child marriage (United Nations, 2015).

The extent of early marriage in Ternate City becomes more evident when examining the distribution of couples by age at first marriage, as presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. Couples of Reproductive Age by Age at First Marriage in Ternate City (2019)**

District	Total Couples	Wives <21 (%)	Wives ≥21 (%)	Husbands <25 (%)	Husbands ≥25 (%)
Ternate Island	1,513	40.65	59.35	46.00	54.00
South Ternate	9,489	38.67	61.33	41.14	58.86
North Ternate	7,069	37.33	62.67	43.05	56.95
Moti Island	878	48.29	51.71	49.54	50.46
Batang Dua Island	611	53.03	46.97	58.92	41.08
Central Ternate	6,692	36.16	63.84	39.35	60.65
Hiri Island	384	37.76	62.24	55.99	44.01
West Ternate	1,730	45.61	54.39	54.34	45.66
Ternate City (Total)	28,366	38.87	61.13	43.10	56.90

Data from the Regional Population and Family Planning Office (DPPKB) reveal that 38.87% of women in Ternate City were married before the age of 21, indicating a substantial prevalence of early marriage. Although the majority of marriages occur at or above the legally recommended age, the proportion of early marriage remains significantly high and socially concerning.

A deeper spatial analysis shows variation across districts. Areas such as Batang Dua Island (53.03%) and Moti Island (48.29%) exhibit particularly high rates of early marriage among women, suggesting that peripheral and island regions may face stronger socio-cultural pressures, limited educational access, and weaker policy outreach. In contrast, urban centers such as Central Ternate show relatively lower rates (36.16%), indicating that urbanization and access to education may play a protective role against early marriage practices.

From a gender perspective, the data also reveal that men tend to marry at older ages compared to women, with only 43.10% marrying before the age of 25. This disparity reflects persistent gender norms in which women are more likely to enter marriage earlier, often influenced by cultural expectations and socio-economic constraints.

Importantly, these findings reinforce the argument that early marriage in Ternate is not merely an individual choice but a structurally embedded phenomenon shaped by geographic, socio-economic, and cultural factors. The relatively high proportion of early marriage across districts indicates that policy interventions, including Mayor Regulation No. 2 of 2021, have not yet effectively addressed the root causes of the issue.

The data presented in Table 2 indicate that early marriage remains prevalent across districts in Ternate City, with 38.87% of women entering marriage before the age of 21. This proportion reflects a persistent socio-demographic challenge, as early marriage is closely associated with lower educational attainment, reduced economic opportunities, and increased vulnerability among young women (UNICEF, 2023; UNFPA, 2022; World Bank, 2022). Spatial disparities are also evident, with higher prevalence in peripheral areas such as Batang Dua Island and Moti Island, suggesting that geographic isolation, limited access to education, and socio-economic inequality play a crucial role in shaping early marriage patterns (BPS, 2023; BKKBN, 2022). Recent studies further confirm that early marriage is strongly linked to poverty cycles and intergenerational inequality, particularly in developing regions (UNESCO, 2022; Girls Not Brides, 2023).

Furthermore, the gender gap in age at first marriage where women tend to marry earlier than men highlights the persistence of entrenched socio-cultural norms and gender inequality (UN Women, 2022; Plan International, 2023). From a policy perspective, this condition reflects ongoing challenges in translating regulatory frameworks into effective implementation at the local level. Contemporary policy implementation literature emphasizes that policy success depends on effective communication, resource allocation, institutional capacity, and stakeholder engagement (OECD, 2021; Howlett & Ramesh, 2020). The persistence of early marriage in Ternate therefore suggests that existing policies, including Mayor Regulation No. 2 of 2021, have not yet achieved optimal impact, indicating a gap between policy design and implementation outcomes (Hill & Hupe, 2022; United Nations, 2023). A more detailed examination of early marriage patterns across districts in Ternate City in 2020 is presented in Table 3.

**Table 3. Couples of Reproductive Age by Age at First Marriage in Ternate City (2020)**

District	Total Couples	Wives <21 (%)	Wives ≥21 (%)	Husbands <25 (%)	Husbands ≥25 (%)
Ternate Island	1,447	40.43	59.50	46.58	53.35
South Ternate	9,295	38.78	61.22	41.25	58.75
North Ternate	6,949	37.29	62.71	43.04	56.96
Moti Island	867	48.10	51.90	49.37	50.63
Batang Dua Island	565	53.45	46.55	59.65	40.35
Central Ternate	6,544	36.25	63.75	39.36	60.64
Hiri Island	372	37.90	62.10	55.91	44.09
West Ternate	1,643	45.22	54.78	54.11	45.89
Ternate City (Total)	27,682	38.86	61.14	43.12	56.87

The data presented in Table 3 show that early marriage remains consistently high in Ternate City, with 38.86% of women marrying before the age of 21 in 2020. This figure is nearly

identical to the 2019 data, indicating that there has been no significant reduction in early marriage prevalence, despite increasing policy attention. Such persistence suggests that early marriage is deeply rooted in structural and socio-cultural factors, including limited access to education, economic vulnerability, and community norms (UNICEF, 2023; UNFPA, 2022; World Bank, 2022).

Spatial disparities also remain evident, with higher rates observed in peripheral areas such as Batang Dua Island (53.45%) and Moti Island (48.10%). These findings reinforce the argument that geographic isolation and unequal development contribute significantly to early marriage practices (BPS, 2023; BKKBN, 2022). Moreover, the gender gap persists, as women continue to marry earlier than men, reflecting entrenched gender norms and inequalities (UN Women, 2022; Girls Not Brides, 2023). From a policy perspective, this stagnation indicates that existing interventions, including Mayor Regulation No. 2 of 2021, have not yet been effectively implemented. Contemporary policy implementation literature emphasizes that without effective communication, local engagement, and institutional capacity, policy outcomes are unlikely to achieve their intended impact (OECD, 2021; Hill & Hupe, 2022; United Nations, 2023).

A longitudinal comparison of early marriage data in Ternate City reveals a pattern of policy stagnation rather than progressive improvement. The proportion of women marrying before the age of 21 remained almost unchanged, recorded at 38.87% in 2019 and 38.86% in 2020, indicating that early marriage persists as a structurally embedded phenomenon. This minimal change suggests that existing interventions have not yet produced measurable outcomes at the population level, despite the introduction of regulatory frameworks.

In 2021, although detailed disaggregated data are not fully presented, the broader demographic indicators particularly the decline in the number of households in Ternate suggest a shift in household dynamics rather than a reduction in early marriage practices. This implies that early marriage may still be occurring but is accompanied by increasing household instability, delayed independence, or economic pressures that affect household formation patterns. Such conditions are consistent with global findings that early marriage often leads to fragile household structures and long-term socio-economic vulnerability (UNICEF, 2023; World Bank, 2022).

From a spatial perspective, the persistence of high early marriage rates in peripheral regions such as Batang Dua and Moti across both 2019 and 2020 highlights geographical inequality as a key determinant. These areas consistently show higher percentages compared to urban districts, reinforcing the argument that access to education, economic opportunities, and policy outreach remains uneven (BPS, 2023; BKKBN, 2022).

From a policy implementation standpoint, the absence of significant change between 2019 and 2020 and the indirect signals observed in 2021 indicate a clear implementation gap. According to contemporary policy implementation theory, effective policy outcomes require not only formal regulation but also strong communication, local-level engagement, and adaptive governance mechanisms (OECD, 2021; Hill & Hupe, 2022). The findings suggest that Mayor Regulation No. 2 of 2021 has not yet been effectively internalized at the community level, particularly among adolescents who remain largely unaware of the policy.

The 2019–2021 trend demonstrates that early marriage in Ternate City is not declining but rather persisting in a stable pattern, indicating policy stagnation and highlighting a structural gap between regulatory frameworks and actual social transformation. This stagnation underscores the urgency of shifting from regulatory approaches toward more transformative, community-based, and education-driven interventions to effectively reduce early marriage practices.

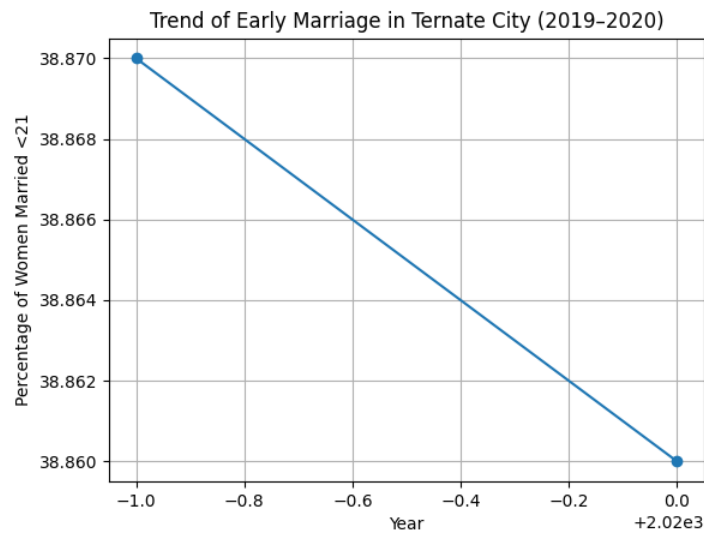


Figure 1. Trend in the Proportion of Women Married Before Age 21 in Ternate City (2019–2020)

Source: Authors' calculation based on DPPKB Ternate City data (2019–2020)

The trend illustrated in Figure X shows that the proportion of women marrying before the age of 21 in Ternate City remained virtually unchanged between 2019 (38.87%) and 2020 (38.86%). This near-identical pattern indicates a stagnant trend, suggesting that early marriage continues to persist despite increasing policy attention and regulatory efforts. Such stability in prevalence highlights that early marriage is deeply embedded within socio-cultural and economic structures, making it resistant to short-term policy interventions (UNICEF, 2023; UNFPA, 2022).

From a policy perspective, the absence of a declining trend reflects a potential gap between policy formulation and implementation. Although regulatory frameworks such as Mayor Regulation No. 2 of 2021 have been introduced, their impact appears limited at the community level. This aligns with contemporary policy implementation literature, which emphasizes that effective outcomes depend on communication, local engagement, and institutional capacity rather than regulation alone (OECD, 2021; Hill & Hupe, 2022). Furthermore, global evidence suggests that reducing early marriage requires integrated approaches involving education, economic empowerment, and community-based interventions, rather than solely relying on legal instruments (World Bank, 2022; United Nations, 2023).

**Table 4. Number of Women of Reproductive Age (WUS) by Age at First Marriage in Ternate City (2021)**

District	Total WUS	<20 Years (%)	≥20 Years (%)
Ternate Island	1,332	21.77	78.23
South Ternate	9,256	20.04	79.96
North Ternate	6,605	19.83	80.17

District	Total WUS	<20 Years (%)	≥20 Years (%)
Moti Island	735	25.17	74.83
Batang Dua Island	437	29.29	70.71
Central Ternate	6,415	20.39	79.61
Hiri Island	472	31.14	68.86
West Ternate	1,583	22.87	77.13

The 2021 data show a notable decline in early marriage prevalence, with only around 20–31% of women marrying before the age of 20, compared to approximately 38% (before age 21) in 2019–2020. At first glance, this suggests a positive shift toward delayed marriage. However, this apparent improvement must be interpreted cautiously, as differences in measurement thresholds (<21 vs <20 years) may partially explain the decline rather than reflecting a substantial behavioral change (UNICEF, 2023; UNFPA, 2022).

A more compelling explanation emerges when examining the sharp decline in marriage dispensation cases, which dropped dramatically from 112 cases in 2020 to only 22 in 2021 and 8 cases in 2022. This trend indicates a significant reduction in formally recorded early marriages. However, rather than signaling the full effectiveness of policy interventions, this decline may also reflect administrative barriers, underreporting, or shifts to informal/unregistered marriages, which are common in contexts where regulatory enforcement increases (World Bank, 2022; Girls Not Brides, 2023).

Spatial disparities remain evident in 2021, with higher early marriage rates in peripheral areas such as Hiri Island (31.14%) and Batang Dua Island (29.29%), reinforcing the role of geographic inequality, limited educational access, and socio-economic constraints (BPS, 2023; BKKBN, 2022). Meanwhile, urban districts such as North and South Ternate show relatively lower rates (~20%), suggesting that urbanization and access to services may contribute to delaying marriage.

From a policy implementation perspective, these mixed signals declining statistical indicators alongside persistent spatial disparities highlight a partial and uneven policy impact. Contemporary policy implementation theory emphasizes that successful outcomes require not only regulation but also effective communication, community engagement, and institutional capacity (OECD, 2021; Hill & Hupe, 2022). The findings suggest that while formal indicators may show improvement, underlying structural drivers of early marriage remain largely unaddressed, indicating a gap between policy outputs and actual social outcomes (United Nations, 2023).

To further understand the dynamics of early marriage in 2021, Table 5 presents the distribution of women of reproductive age based on age at first marriage, complemented by data on marriage dispensation cases.

**Table 5. Number of Marriage Dispensation Cases in Ternate Religious Court (2020–2022)**

Year	Number of Cases	Notes
2020	112	—
2021	22	—
2022	8	As of September 15, 2022

Table 5 presents the distribution of women of reproductive age (WUS) in Ternate City based on age at first marriage in 2021. The data show that the majority of women were married at the age of 20 years and above, with proportions ranging from 68.86% to 80.17% across districts. Nevertheless, the proportion of women marrying before the age of 20 remains substantial, ranging between 19.83% and 31.14%, indicating that early marriage continues to be a significant social issue in Ternate City.

Spatial disparities are clearly visible in the data. Peripheral areas such as Hiri Island (31.14%) and Batang Dua Island (29.29%) exhibit the highest prevalence of early marriage, while urban areas such as North Ternate (19.83%) and South Ternate (20.04%) show relatively lower rates. This pattern suggests that geographic location, access to education, and socio-economic conditions play a critical role in shaping early marriage practices. Previous studies have shown that early marriage is more prevalent in areas with limited access to education and economic opportunities (UNICEF, 2023; World Bank, 2022).

Furthermore, although the overall proportion of early marriage appears lower compared to previous years, this reduction should be interpreted cautiously due to differences in measurement thresholds (<20 years in 2021 versus <21 years in earlier data). This discrepancy may lead to an underestimation of the actual prevalence of early marriage. From a policy perspective, these findings indicate that while there may be signs of improvement, early marriage remains structurally embedded within certain communities. Effective policy implementation therefore requires not only regulatory enforcement but also targeted interventions addressing education, socio-economic inequality, and community awareness (OECD, 2021; United Nations, 2023).

This study employs a qualitative research approach, utilizing in-depth interviews with selected key informants who are closely related to the research topic. In addition, this study refers to several previous studies to facilitate data collection and strengthen the analytical framework.

Several relevant prior studies are reviewed as follows. First, Sonny Dewi Judiasih et al. (2022) applied a normative juridical approach focusing on legal efforts; however, their study did not examine binding local regulations. In contrast, the present study analyzes a legally binding local policy in the form of a mayoral regulation. Second, Ilham Laman (2017) also used a qualitative method, but his research was limited to a single village, whereas this study adopts a broader scope at the city level. Third, Dede Hafirman (2017) emphasized a sociological approach focusing primarily on religious

aspects, while this study integrates not only religious perspectives but also bureaucratic and policy dimensions. Fourth, Andi Jayanti (2018) focused on a single district, whereas this study expands the coverage to the entire city. Finally, Eva Nurhayati (2017) conducted research at the village level, while the present study includes multiple island areas within Ternate City.

Based on the theoretical perspectives on early marriage, policy, and implementation, as well as empirical data on early marriage in Ternate from 2020 to 2022, this study positions the mayoral regulation as a policy response to a persistent social issue. The development of a conceptual framework is intended to facilitate a comprehensive analysis of all relevant aspects, including local government agencies (OPD), vertical institutions, and youth as key stakeholders directly affected by early marriage. This framework also serves as the basis for understanding the rationale behind the issuance of the mayoral regulation and its expected impact on reducing early marriage practices in Ternate City.

To support the analysis, this study adopts the network management theory of collaboration among actors proposed by G. Edward DeSeve (2007). This theory is considered relevant as it emphasizes inter-organizational collaboration, coordination, and stakeholder engagement, which are crucial in the implementation of public policy. The application of this theory aligns with the observed conditions in the field, particularly regarding the implementation of the mayoral regulation on early marriage prevention in Ternate City.



Figure 2. Conceptual Framework of the Implementation of Mayor Regulation on Early Marriage Prevention in Ternate City

Based on the aforementioned background, this study aims to further examine the implementation of the Mayor Regulation policy on early marriage prevention, entitled “The Implementation of Mayor Regulation on Early Marriage Prevention (A Case Study of Senior High School Students in Ternate City).”

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

This study employs a qualitative research approach, which is considered appropriate given the focus and scope of the study involving multiple stakeholders. The research utilizes a descriptive qualitative method aimed at systematically, factually, and accurately describing the phenomenon under investigation. This approach enables the researcher to explore in depth and interpret the real conditions related to the implementation of the mayoral regulation on early marriage prevention among high school students in Ternate City.

Qualitative research in this study is intended to capture detailed insights and realities of policy implementation through descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words, as well as observable behaviors from the selected informants. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of how the policy is applied and perceived in real-life contexts.

### **Data Sources**

The study uses both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data are obtained through qualitative methods, particularly in-depth interviews with key informants who are considered to have relevant knowledge and experience. These include representatives from the Religious Court of Ternate City, the Population and Family Planning Office, the Women’s Empowerment and Child Protection Office, local NGOs, and 100 randomly selected high school students.

Secondary data serve as supporting information and are derived from documents, reports, literature, and previous research relevant to early marriage and policy implementation. These data provide contextual and comparative insights to strengthen the analysis.

### **Research Instruments**

In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary instrument, responsible for determining the research focus, selecting informants, collecting and analyzing data, and drawing conclusions. Supporting instruments include interview guidelines to ensure consistency and relevance of questions, writing tools for field notes, recording devices (audio and visual), and relevant documents or literature used to support data collection and analysis.

### **Data Collection Techniques**

Data were collected using three main techniques. First, observation was conducted to identify and understand phenomena occurring within the community or institutions, providing initial insights into the research problem. Second, in-depth interviews were

carried out using an open-ended format, allowing flexibility and encouraging informants to provide detailed and authentic responses. Third, documentation study was employed to collect written records and institutional data relevant to the research topic.

### **Data Analysis Technique**

Data analysis in this study follows the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman (2004), which consists of three concurrent activities: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. This process is conducted continuously and iteratively until data saturation is achieved, ensuring the validity and reliability of the findings.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Ternate City was selected as the research site in this study. It is one of ten regencies/cities in North Maluku Province, consisting of eight districts distributed across four islands, including three outer islands (Batang Dua, Moti, and Hiri) and five districts located on Ternate Island. In terms of education, Ternate serves as a central hub, particularly at the senior high school level, attracting students from surrounding areas due to the availability and quality of educational institutions.

The increasing number of students pursuing education in Ternate has contributed to both positive and negative social impacts. One of the most significant issues observed is the rise in early marriage cases among adolescents, which has shown an increasing trend over time. In response, the local government has implemented various preventive measures, including the issuance of Mayor Regulation No. 2 of 2021 on Early Marriage Prevention. This regulation is expected to serve as a strategic policy instrument to address the growing concern.

Data collection in this study involved in-depth interviews with four key informants representing government institutions, the Religious Court, and civil society organizations, as well as questionnaire responses from 100 senior high school students across ten schools in Ternate City and Moti Island. The findings indicate that a significant proportion of students remain unaware of the existence of the mayoral regulation, suggesting limited policy dissemination and engagement among the primary target group.

### **Discussion**

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of the mayoral regulation on early marriage prevention in Ternate City has not yet achieved its intended outcomes. Despite the formal establishment of the policy in 2021, both interview results and questionnaire data reveal that awareness among senior high school students remains low. This suggests a significant gap between policy formulation and implementation, particularly in terms of communication and outreach. According to policy implementation theory, effective implementation depends heavily on clear communication, adequate resources, and stakeholder engagement (OECD, 2021; Hill &

Hupe, 2022). The limited awareness observed among adolescents indicates that these elements have not been optimally fulfilled.

Furthermore, the persistence of early marriage practices reflects deeply rooted socio-cultural and economic factors. Early marriage is often influenced by traditional norms, family expectations, and socio-economic constraints, particularly in regions with limited access to education and information (UNICEF, 2023; UNFPA, 2022). The findings from this study highlight that in Ternate, early marriage is frequently perceived as a private family matter rather than a broader social issue, which reduces community participation in prevention efforts. This aligns with global evidence suggesting that early marriage is sustained by cultural acceptance and structural inequality (World Bank, 2022; Girls Not Brides, 2023).

In addition, the role of family and parenting patterns emerges as a critical determinant. The distinction between native and migrant communities in Ternate illustrates how cultural diversity shapes attitudes toward early marriage. In some cases, traditional beliefs and limited educational backgrounds contribute to the normalization of early marriage, including the perception that marrying early is socially desirable. Previous studies have emphasized that parental influence and household socio-economic conditions significantly affect early marriage decisions among adolescents (UNESCO, 2022; Plan International, 2023).

From a governance perspective, the findings can be further explained using the network management theory proposed by G. Edward DeSeve (2007), which emphasizes collaboration among multiple actors. Effective policy implementation requires strong coordination among government agencies, judicial institutions, civil society organizations, and the community. However, this study finds that such collaboration in Ternate remains suboptimal, particularly in terms of information dissemination, shared goals, and access to resources. This condition reflects broader challenges in collaborative governance, where weak inter-organizational coordination can limit policy effectiveness (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Howlett & Ramesh, 2020). Moreover, the persistence of early marriage cases, including the continued submission of marriage dispensation requests to the Religious Court, indicates that regulatory measures alone are insufficient. Global research highlights that reducing early marriage requires integrated approaches combining legal frameworks, education, economic empowerment, and community engagement (United Nations, 2023; World Bank, 2022). Without addressing these underlying factors, policies are likely to remain symbolic rather than transformative.

In conclusion, the findings suggest that the implementation of the mayoral regulation in Ternate City has not yet produced significant social change. The persistence of early marriage reflects a complex interplay between weak policy implementation, socio-cultural norms, and structural inequalities. Therefore, more comprehensive and context-sensitive strategies are needed to enhance policy effectiveness and achieve sustainable outcomes in early marriage prevention.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Mayor Regulation on early marriage prevention in Ternate City has not yet been

effective. First, early marriage remains a significant and persistent social issue, with evidence from data, interviews, and questionnaires indicating that cases have continued to increase over the past five years. This suggests that early marriage is not only prevalent but also structurally embedded within the community.

Second, although the local government has introduced the mayoral regulation as a policy response, its implementation has not achieved the intended impact. The regulation remains largely unknown among key target groups, including parents, teachers, and students, particularly in peripheral areas such as Moti Island. This reflects a critical weakness in policy communication and dissemination.

Third, the continued occurrence of domestic violence cases and the increasing number of marriage dispensation requests submitted to the Religious Court further indicate that early marriage remains a serious concern. These trends suggest that the policy has not yet succeeded in addressing the root causes of the issue.

Finally, the lack of synergy among stakeholders, including government agencies, educational institutions, and community organizations, has limited the effectiveness of policy implementation. The absence of targeted socialization strategies and coordinated actions has resulted in uneven policy reach and limited community engagement, particularly among adolescents who are the primary target of the policy.

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