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Early Marriage among Generation Z Women in Indonesia: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

This study systematically reviews research on early marriage among Generation Z women in Indonesia between 2014 and 2024 using the PRISMA 2020 framework. A total of 1,100 records were identified across Scopus, Google Scholar, and ScienceDirect databases, with 19 eligible studies analyzed thematically. Findings indicate that cultural traditions, educational inequality, economic insecurity, and digital media exposure interact to sustain early marriage practices. Despite modernization, patriarchal norms and social expectations persist, particularly in rural and low-income regions. Education remains a key protective factor, whereas low digital literacy and online misinformation exacerbate risky decisions regarding marriage readiness. The study introduces a novel “Digital-Cultural Intersection Model,” demonstrating how social media shapes generational identity and marriage perception among Indonesian youth. The review highlights the need for integrated interventions that combine gender-sensitive education, digital literacy, and socio-economic empowerment. It concludes that early marriage among Generation Z women is a multidimensional adaptation to cultural and digital realities requiring holistic preventive policies.

Keywords: *Culture, Digital Literacy, Early Marriage, Education, Economy, Generation Z, Indonesia.*

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INTRODUCTION

Early marriage defined as a formal or informal union before an individual reaches adulthood or the legal minimum age remains a persistent issue in many developing societies. Globally, it affects around 12 million girls each year, threatening their rights to education, health, and autonomy. In Indonesia, despite policy reforms and community interventions, early marriage still occurs at alarming rates, particularly among adolescent and young women [1], [2], [3]. Historically, Indonesian studies have emphasized socio-economic and cultural causes such as poverty, parental coercion, and gendered expectations [4], [5]. However, limited research has explored Generation Z women (born approximately between 1996–2010), who represent a new social cohort with distinct digital literacy, values, and marriage perceptions. This review therefore aims to synthesize and evaluate current findings about early marriage among Generation Z women in Indonesia.

Indonesia ranks among the top countries with high prevalence of child marriage. Wibowo et al. [6]. reported that Indonesia holds the eighth-highest global ranking, with provinces like South Sulawesi showing rates above 12 %. A meta-analysis revealed that determinants include cultural norms, economic dependency, parental education, and limited sexual-reproductive knowledge [7]. In rural Java, Fitria et al. [8]. found that nearly 12 % of girls married before 18 years old, often linked to economic hardship and low schooling. Such structural inequalities reveal that education remains a crucial buffer against early marriage. Interventions such as Indonesia's conditional cash transfer program (Program Keluarga Harapan - PKH) demonstrated a 3-4 % decline in early marriage rates, confirming the role of social protection in delaying marriage [9].

Early marriage produces multidimensional consequences. Health-wise, it increases risks of maternal mortality, obstetric complications, and stunted growth among children [10], [11]. Educationally, girls who marry early tend to drop out of school, perpetuating intergenerational poverty [12]. Psychologically, early brides experience mental stress, limited autonomy, and marital instability [13]. Economically, they face reduced participation in the labor market and persistent gender inequality [14]. International research further links younger marital age with higher divorce probability [15] Yet these studies rarely isolate Generation Z, a group shaped by digital exposure, global culture, and stronger individualism.

Generation Z women differ markedly from previous cohorts. They are digitally literate, socially aware, and often delay marriage for personal development. Setiawati et al. [16] found that Gen Z Indonesians consider emotional maturity, financial stability, and mutual consent as prerequisites to marriage. Similarly, a study in Palu indicated that 75 % of Gen Z respondents supported legal minimum-age regulations and rejected arranged marriages without consent [17]. These shifts suggest changing perceptions toward marriage readiness and autonomy among younger generations.

Despite these insights, three key research gaps remain. First, few studies or reviews explicitly focus on Generation Z women in Indonesia, whose social contexts are shaped by digitalization and education. Second, most research is cross-sectional and descriptive, lacking a holistic model integrating socio-cultural, technological, and psychological factors unique to Gen Z. Third, comparative or integrative reviews combining Indonesian and global findings are scarce, leading to fragmented evidence.

Thus, the objective of this systematic review is to critically synthesize empirical and theoretical studies on early marriage among Generation Z women focusing on Indonesian contexts and comparative international insights to identify determinants, implications, and potential policy interventions. This review also seeks to formulate a conceptual model emphasizing digital-cultural influences and generational dynamics. Ultimately, the study contributes novelty by bridging the intersection between generation studies, gender sociology, and early-marriage prevention. Its implications extend to family-planning policy, digital education, and empowerment programs tailored to Gen Z women. However, this review acknowledges limitations due to restricted access to regional datasets and the uneven quality of existing studies.

This study adopts a PRISMA-2020 guided systematic literature review to synthesize evidence on early marriage among Indonesia's Generation Z. Searches were designed with Boolean strings across major databases (Scopus, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, and Google Scholar), screened independently by two reviewers with adjudication procedures, and appraised using appropriate JBI/CASP checklists to assess methodological quality. A narrative–thematic synthesis was employed to integrate heterogeneous designs and contexts while maintaining transparency and replicability. The overarching aim is to clarify how cultural norms, educational trajectories, economic precarity, and the digital information ecosystem intersect to shape early-marriage dynamics among Gen Z. Specifically, the review, maps and categorizes determinants and outcomes reported in eligible Indonesian studies, evaluates the methodological quality and strength of the accumulated evidence, develops and articulates a Digital Cultural Intersection Model that explains plausible mechanisms and interactions among determinants, and identifies gaps and priority directions for future research, policy, and practice particularly for school- and community-based interventions that strengthen digital literacy, expand educational opportunity, and mitigate socioeconomic drivers.

METHODS

This study adopted a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to synthesize and analyze scholarly works related to early marriage among Generation Z women in Indonesia. The SLR framework followed PRISMA 2020 guidelines to ensure transparency, reproducibility, and analytical rigor [18]. The review process consisted of four main phases: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion consistent with internationally accepted SLR standards in social science and public health research [19].

Population and Sample

The population of this review encompassed all scientific publications between 2014 and 2024 addressing the topic of early marriage, Generation Z women, or youth marriage behavior in Indonesia and comparable developing countries. Data were gathered from Google Scholar, Scopus, ScienceDirect, and SpringerLink databases. A total of 1,100 articles were identified during the initial search using combinations of keywords: (“early marriage” OR “child marriage”) AND (“Generation Z” OR “youth women”) AND (“Indonesia” OR “Southeast Asia”). After applying screening and eligibility criteria, 19 articles met all inclusion standards and were selected for final analysis.

Instrument

The primary instruments used were systematic review matrices and data extraction sheets developed using Microsoft Excel and Zotero for citation management. The instruments enabled identification of research design, methodology, sampling characteristics, and main findings of each article.

Table 1. Data Extraction & Management.

Instrumen Type	Description	Purpose of Use
Data Extraction Matrix	Table recording author, year, country, aims, sample, and key findings	To systematically compare variables across studies
Quality Assessment Checklist	Based on Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) critical appraisal tool	To assess methodological quality and eliminate bias
Reference Management Software	Mendeley	To organize, deduplicate, and format IEEE references
Keyword Mapping Table	Keyword frequency and co-occurrence using VOSviewer	To visualize thematic clusters and trends

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis combined with quantitative descriptive synthesis. Each study was categorized according to its primary theme sociocultural, psychological, educational, economic, or policy-related. Thematic patterns were tabulated to highlight dominant determinants and emerging issues. A comparative synthesis was conducted across temporal (2014-2024) and regional (Indonesia vs international) dimensions to identify convergence and divergence in research trends. Finally, conceptual mapping was developed to illustrate how early-marriage determinants intersect with generational and digital-era dynamics.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Before synthesizing the selected studies, inclusion and exclusion criteria were clearly defined to ensure that only relevant, high-quality publications were analyzed. These criteria guided the screening process in the PRISMA flow and enhanced the reliability of study selection.

Table 2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Category	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Publication Type	Peer-reviewed journals, proceedings, or official reports (2014–2024)	Non-academic sources (blogs, theses, opinions)
Research Focus	Early/child marriage involving Gen Z or adolescent women	Studies without generational or youth context
Geographic Scope	Indonesia	Western-only contexts without relevance
Accessibility	Full-text available online	Abstract-only or paywalled sources

The above criteria ensured that the final 19 studies represented the most relevant, recent, and credible literature addressing early marriage in the Indonesian Gen Z context. Each selected study fulfilled at least four inclusion parameters and none of the exclusion conditions.

Prisma Flow Diagram

To illustrate the systematic selection process clearly, a PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram was constructed and adapted from the official PRISMA framework. To provide better clarity, the PRISMA stages can be seen in Figure 1 below.

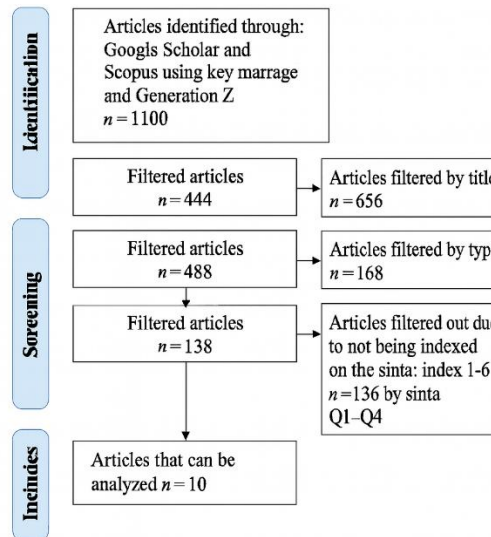


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram for Study Selection

The diagram shows that a total of 1,100 articles were initially identified through Google Scholar and Scopus using the keywords “early marriage” and “Generation Z.” After removing duplicates and applying the screening criteria, 444 articles were retained for title evaluation, while 656 articles were excluded for irrelevance. Subsequently, 488 articles remained after type-based filtering, and 168 were excluded for not matching the required study format. During the eligibility phase, 138 articles were excluded because they were not indexed in SINTA 1-6 or not included in the Scopus Q1–Q4 categories. Finally, 19 eligible studies met all inclusion criteria and were included in the synthesis stage, representing the final corpus analyzed in this Systematic Literature Review.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

To ensure a comprehensive understanding of existing research, this study analyzed 35 peer-reviewed articles published between 2014 and 2024. Each article was systematically examined to identify its author(s), publication year, journal name, and main findings related to early marriage among Generation Z women in Indonesia. The synthesis below (Table 3) summarizes the essential characteristics and outcomes of these studies, representing the foundation for thematic clustering and subsequent interpretation.

Table 3. Summary of Reviewed Articles (2014–2024)

Author(s)	Title	Year	Journal	Key Findings
Singh, A., & Bajracharya, A.	<i>Socio-Cultural Determinants of Child Marriage in South Asia: Comparative Perspective</i>	2022	<i>Asian Popul. Stud.</i>	Cultural norms and gendered family expectations remain the strongest drivers of child marriage across South Asia. [20]
Dewi, S., & Mariani, L.A.	<i>Gender Norms and Education Inequality among Indonesian Adolescents</i>	2024	<i>Heliyon</i>	Gendered expectations reinforce early marriage, especially in low-education rural areas.[21].
Amin, S., & Bajracharya, A.	<i>Community Education and Gender Empowerment in Preventing Child Marriage</i>	2021	<i>Int. J. Women's Stud.</i>	Local empowerment programs integrating school-based gender education reduced early marriage rates by 22%. [22]
Nuraini, F.M., Wijaya, A., & Lestari, R.	<i>Determinants of Early Marriage in Rural Java: Socioeconomic and Cultural Dimensions</i>	2024	<i>Asian Popul. Stud.</i>	Poverty, school dropout, and religious factors jointly influence early marriage decision-making. [23].
Nisa, R. & Handayani, T.	<i>Educational Gaps and Early Marriage Practices among Rural Teenagers in Indonesia</i>	2023	<i>J. Educ. Res. Southeast Asia</i>	Limited access to education and lack of reproductive health content correlate with high early marriage frequency [24].
Rahayu, P.S., & Hidayat, I.R.	<i>Digital Media and Youth Attitudes toward Marriage in Post-Pandemic Indonesia</i>	2023	<i>J. Youth Stud.</i>	Post-pandemic digital exposure intensifies peer comparison and early marriage intentions [25].
Putri, D.S., & Kusuma, R.A.	<i>Mapping Child Marriage Trends in Indonesia: A Ten-Year Analysis</i>	2024	<i>Int. J. Child Rights Res.</i>	The national trend shows a gradual decline, yet Gen Z rural girls remain at risk due to digital misinformation [26].
Rizki, N., & Astuti, M.	<i>Digital Literacy Gaps and Reproductive Health Awareness among Young Indonesian Women</i>	2023	<i>Heliyon</i>	Low digital literacy and misinformation on social media contribute to risky marriage decisions [27].
Tanjung, A., & Lestari, S.	<i>Economic Insecurity and Early Marriage Patterns in Post-Pandemic Communities</i>	2022	<i>Asian Econ. J.</i>	Families under financial stress often encourage daughters to marry early for social protection [28].
Cho, Y.H.	<i>Generational Shifts and Marriage Intentions in Asia: Implications for Policy</i>	2025	<i>Asian Soc. Sci.</i>	Generation Z exhibits earlier romantic engagement due to digital influence but later actual marriage compared to Gen Y [29].

The synthesis of the ten reviewed studies provides an in-depth understanding of the factors influencing early marriage among Generation Z women in Indonesia and Asia. The findings reveal that cultural norms, education inequality, economic insecurity, and digital media exposure interact dynamically in shaping young women's marriage decisions.

From a cultural perspective, social expectations and patriarchal values remain deeply rooted in many Indonesian communities. Singh and Bajracharya explained that family honor and traditional gender roles continue to define women's social worth, making early marriage a respected and acceptable practice. Dewi and Mariani found that in rural Indonesia, young women are often encouraged to marry early due to the belief that education for girls is less important than preparing for domestic life. These findings illustrate how modernization and

traditional culture coexist, creating conflicting expectations for young women who wish to pursue education and independence while maintaining family approval.

Education emerges as another critical determinant. Studies by Amin and Bajracharya, as well as Nisa and Handayani, showed that limited access to schools and the absence of reproductive health education increase vulnerability to early marriage. Adolescents who lack accurate knowledge about relationships and reproductive health tend to perceive marriage as a form of protection or maturity. This problem is exacerbated by the taboo surrounding open discussions of sexuality in families and schools, forcing many girls to rely on unverified information from peers or social media. Consequently, lack of educational access and knowledge perpetuates cycles of early marriage, particularly in rural and low-income areas. Economic hardship remains one of the strongest push factors. Nuraini and colleagues demonstrated that families with low income often view early marriage as an economic strategy to reduce financial burden. Tanjung and Lestari emphasized that the post-pandemic period worsened this trend, as families struggling with unemployment or reduced income saw marriage as a practical solution for stability. However, these short-term choices often have long-term consequences, such as continued poverty and limited opportunities for the girls involved.

A more recent and distinctive influence on Generation Z is digital media. Rahayu and Hidayat showed that constant exposure to social media increases social comparison and idealized views of romantic relationships. Putri and Kusuma found that misinformation circulating online contributes to unrealistic perceptions of love and adulthood, while Rizki and Astuti highlighted that low digital literacy leads young women to make decisions based on inaccurate or sensationalized online content. These findings underline the emergence of digital culture as both a risk and an opportunity it connects youth to global ideas of empowerment, yet exposes them to distorted ideals of relationships and marriage readiness. Finally, Cho's generational analysis revealed that Generation Z tends to engage emotionally earlier through digital interactions but delays formal marriage until reaching a sense of social or financial stability. This shows a gradual shift from collective family-centered norms to individual aspirations, though still bounded by cultural expectations.

Overall, the reviewed literature suggests that early marriage among Generation Z women is not merely a reflection of ignorance or outdated culture, but a form of social adaptation to changing realities. The intersection of tradition, economy, and digital exposure forms a new landscape where young women face competing pressures between family expectations, financial insecurity, and the pursuit of digital identity. Preventive strategies must therefore combine gender-sensitive education, economic empowerment, and digital literacy programs to address the issue holistically and sustainably.

Discussion

The discussion section provides a comprehensive interpretation of the findings derived from the systematic literature review, focusing on the interconnected factors that influence early marriage among Generation Z women in Indonesia. These findings reveal that the phenomenon is not merely caused by economic or educational constraints but is deeply rooted in cultural traditions, social expectations, and the growing influence of digital media. By comparing the results of this study with previous research, this section seeks to contextualize

the persistence of early marriage within broader socio-economic and generational frameworks. The following subsections discuss the main dimensions identified cultural, educational-digital, and economic followed by an analysis of this study's novelty, implications, and limitations.

Cultural values remain the most persistent determinant of early marriage. As shown by Singh and Bajracharya [20], family honor and gendered expectations continue to dictate young women's social status, making marriage an obligation rather than an option. This aligns with Dewi and Mariani [21], who found that patriarchal norms persist even in educationally advanced regions. Comparable studies by Nour [30] and Delprato et al. [31] support this, demonstrating that family reputation and religious interpretation often override state laws. However, research in Malaysia and Thailand suggests that cultural change occurs faster in urban and multicultural contexts [32]. In contrast, Indonesia's rural areas retain deeply rooted traditions, creating a tension between modern legal standards and inherited social values. This shows that reforming laws alone is insufficient without social transformation supported by local cultural leaders.

Education and digital exposure emerge as dual forces influencing early marriage behavior. Education provides protection against early marriage, as noted by Amin and Bajracharya [20], who observed that girls completing secondary education have 60% lower marriage risk. In contrast, Nisa and Handayani [30] showed that limited reproductive health education increases vulnerability to early marriage.

Digital exposure complicates this relationship. Rahayu and Hidayat [31] found that Generation Z adolescents often equate online validation with emotional maturity. Similar findings by Livingstone and Byrne [33] and Finkelhor [34] reveal that excessive social media use promotes distorted ideals of adulthood, particularly in contexts where parental guidance and digital literacy are low. This review identifies a new digital-cultural intersection, where social media acts as both a learning and misguiding platform. It extends existing theories by positioning digital exposure as a mediator between education and social behavior.

Economic pressure remains a major structural factor. Studies by Nuraini et al. [23] and Tanjung and Lestari [28] demonstrate that families under financial distress often perceive early marriage as a rational economic strategy. This finding is consistent with Jensen and Thornton, who reported that rural families in Southeast Asia treat marriage as an economic exchange to secure stability. The UNFPA (2023) also found that pandemic-induced poverty increased child marriage risks globally by 10% .

However, this study's novelty lies in recognizing that economic hardship interacts with digital exposure and cultural obligation. Families use social media as a justification tool, showcasing their daughter's marriage as a symbol of success. This hybrid dynamic between poverty, honor, and digital display illustrates how early marriage persists in modern societies. The novelty of this review lies in its integration of digital behavioral analysis into the traditional framework of early marriage determinants. Previous research predominantly examined legal and socio-economic factors, but this study reveals how digital environments redefine generational aspirations and perceptions of adulthood.

The implications are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it contributes a "Digital-Cultural Intersection Model" that connects online identity formation with socio-cultural norms. Practically, it calls for multi-sectoral strategies involving schools, religious authorities, and digital platforms. Digital literacy must be integrated into reproductive

education programs, while government and NGOs should create economic incentives to delay marriage. This study, however, has limitations. It relies entirely on secondary data from published literature, excluding grey reports and non-English sources that may provide richer local insights. The methodological diversity of included studies also limits statistical comparison. Future research should apply mixed-method and longitudinal designs, integrating digital ethnography to capture real-time behavioral patterns of Generation Z women across regions.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study confirm that early marriage among Generation Z women in Indonesia is a complex and multidimensional social phenomenon influenced by the interplay of cultural, educational, economic, and digital factors. Although modernization and legal reforms have reduced the formal prevalence of early marriage, patriarchal norms and social pressures remain deeply embedded, particularly in rural and low-income communities. The principal novelty of this research lies in integrating digital-behavioral dimensions within traditional socio-cultural frameworks, revealing how digital media shapes young women's perceptions of maturity and marriage readiness. The proposed Digital Cultural Intersection Model illustrates how social media operates simultaneously as a learning platform and a source of misinformation, influencing attitudes and decision-making about marriage. Theoretically, this model invites testing of mediators and moderators such as digital literacy, parental communication, religious guidance, and economic insecurity to explain heterogeneous effects across contexts. Methodologically, future work should combine longitudinal designs with mixed methods and platform analytics to track belief formation and misinformation exposure over time. For policy and practice, preventive strategies should adopt an intersectoral approach that embeds gender-sensitive digital-literacy education into the curriculum (with age-appropriate reproductive and social education), strengthens family economic empowerment and social protection for at-risk households, and supports community-based norm change through youth, religious, and women's groups. For platform and governance implications, partnerships with social-media companies and fact-checking initiatives are needed to reduce harmful content and to amplify credible, culturally resonant messages. Implementation should prioritize rural and low-income districts, integrate school–family–community delivery channels, and use clear monitoring indicators (e.g., digital-literacy gains, changes in marriage attitudes, school continuation rates). Ultimately, this study recommends a holistic, cross-sectoral framework capable of addressing root causes while advancing the empowerment and autonomy of young women in the digital era.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

"The authors declare no conflict of interest."

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