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Family Challenges in the Indonesia-Malaysia Border Areas: Early Marriage, Child Violence, and Stunting in Sambas Regency

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Abstract

The rise of early marriage, child violence, and stunting that occur in Indonesia are problems and challenges in building family welfare. This study delves into the significant family challenges in Sambas Regency, West Kalimantan Province, Indonesia, bordering Malaysia. It focuses on three critical issues: early marriage, child violence, and stunting. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, we gathered data through interviews, observations, and documentation, ensuring accuracy with triangulation methods. The findings are quite alarming. Early marriage rates are high, with 563 cases involving teenagers aged 15-19 in 2022 alone. Child violence, particularly sexual abuse, remains a grave concern, with 101 cases reported over the past three years. Stunting, which hampers early childhood development, affects 30.5% of children, especially in urban areas. These challenges underscore the urgent need for integrated policies that address economic, educational, and social factors to support family welfare. While our study has limitations, such as relying on reported cases and being cross-sectional, it lays the groundwork for future research and policy-making. We recommend adopting longitudinal and comparative studies to better understand regional differences and causal factors. Tackling these issues requires a sustained, multifaceted approach and collaborative efforts from all stakeholders. Together, we can create a supportive environment for families, break the cycle of poverty, and promote sustainable development in border areas.

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Introduction

Family dynamics and welfare are pivotal concerns globally, impacting societal stability and individual well-being. In Indonesia, particularly in border regions like the Indonesia-Malaysia frontier, families face acute challenges such as early marriage, child violence, and stunting, which have significant implications for national development and public health (Rahmadiyah et al., 2024; Rumble et al., 2018; Supraptiningsih, 2021). These issues are not only local concerns but also resonate globally, underscoring the universal need for effective family policies and interventions (Dai & Wang, 2015; Tan & Fang, 2023). Addressing these challenges is crucial for fostering resilient and healthy communities that can contribute positively to societal progress.

Research has extensively documented the roles and functions of families as fundamental social units. Families provide essential support for the physical and mental development of individuals and serve as the primary environment for socialization and the transmission of cultural norms (Taylor, 2012). Studies have shown that strong family structures are associated with better educational outcomes and higher levels of social cohesion (Tan & Fang, 2023). Additionally, the family is seen as a vital component of the social capital that underpins community stability and individual well-being (Tenri Awaru, 2021). These roles highlight the importance of supporting family welfare through targeted policies and interventions.

In the Indonesian context, family policies have focused on fostering family resilience and welfare, aligning with broader goals of social development and equity (Oktriyanto et al., 2023). However, despite these efforts, significant challenges persist, particularly in areas undergoing

rapid demographic and economic changes (Qibthiyah & Utomo, 2016). The cultural emphasis on heteronormative and pronatalist family models further complicates these issues, often limiting the effectiveness of policies aimed at addressing diverse family needs (Hintz & Brown, 2020). These cultural and policy dynamics play a crucial role in shaping family experiences and outcomes in Indonesia.

Specific issues such as early marriage, child violence, and stunting are prevalent in Indonesia and have far-reaching consequences for family welfare. Early marriage, for instance, remains a significant concern, with Indonesia ranking among the highest globally for such cases (Hartarto et al., 2023). Similarly, child violence, as reported by the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, affects a substantial number of children annually, undermining their rights and well-being (Alifiyah & Anshori, 2023). Stunting, reflecting chronic malnutrition, is another critical issue, with Indonesia's prevalence rates exceeding the WHO's threshold, indicating widespread nutritional deficiencies (Handayani & Rahayu, 2023). These issues are particularly pronounced in border areas, where access to resources is often limited.

Research on families in Indonesia has largely focused on aspects such as gender dynamics, parenting roles, and economic welfare. Studies have explored the intersection of family and gender, highlighting issues of inequality and the impacts of feminist perspectives (Herlambang et al., 2023; Kunto & Bras, 2018; Rahayu et al., 2023; Wieringa, 2015). Additionally, research on parenting has emphasized the importance of family involvement in child development and education (Abubakar et al., 2023; Aghnaita & Murniati, 2023; Fitriani et al., 2023; Haar et al., 2023). The economic dimension of family welfare has also been a significant focus, with studies examining the impacts of economic policies and conditions on family stability and well-being (Risna Putri et al., 2023; Samodra et al., 2023; Siregar et al., 2023).

Despite these comprehensive studies, there remain significant gaps in understanding the specific challenges faced by families in border regions. These areas often experience unique socio-economic and political dynamics that exacerbate family welfare issues (Abdullah & Sari, 2014). The lack of targeted research and policy interventions in these regions highlights a critical gap that needs to be addressed. The government's struggles to provide adequate public goods and services in these areas further complicate the situation, emphasizing the need for a more nuanced approach to policy-making (Wahyuni et al., 2022).

This study aims to fill these gaps by focusing on the family issues prevalent in the Sambas area of West Kalimantan Province, along the Indonesia-Malaysia border. By examining early marriage, child violence, and stunting within this specific context, the study seeks to provide a detailed analysis of the challenges faced by families in border regions. The findings are expected to contribute to the broader discourse on family welfare and inform more effective policy interventions tailored to the unique needs of border communities. This research underscores the importance of addressing family welfare issues holistically, considering the socio-economic, cultural, and political contexts that shape family experiences.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative research design with a descriptive approach to uncover family-related issues in Sambas Regency, West Kalimantan Province, Indonesia, which shares a border with Malaysia. The research focused on early marriage, child violence, and stunting, utilizing both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were collected through interviews, observation, and documentation (Soehadha, 2018). Interviews targeted officials from the Office of Women's Empowerment, Child Protection, Population Control, and Family Planning, as well as religious leaders such as the Chairman of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) in Sambas Regency, to gather diverse perspectives on the family problems in the region. Observations were conducted to examine the social and cultural conditions, while documentation involved the collection of relevant documents on family issues in Sambas Regency. The study utilized audio recording devices for interviews, digital cameras for

observational documentation, and software tools such as NVivo for qualitative data analysis. These tools ensured accurate data capture and facilitated detailed analysis.

Data collection followed the framework proposed by Miles and Huberman, which includes data condensation, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions (Miles et al., 2014). The data condensation process involved selecting relevant information, focusing on data pertinent to the research questions, and abstracting key findings. This systematic approach facilitated the transformation of raw data into a manageable and interpretable format. Data display was achieved through the organization of condensed data into matrices and charts, aiding in the visualization of patterns and relationships. Verification involved rigorous cross-checking of data through triangulation, which compared interview data with observational and documentary evidence to ensure consistency and reliability (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). To ensure the study's reliability and validity, data triangulation was used to compare and corroborate information from various sources and methods, enhancing the credibility of the findings. Methodological triangulation involved using different data collection methods—interviews, observation, and documentation—to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issues. Additionally, peer debriefing and member checking were conducted, where findings were discussed with colleagues and participants to verify the accuracy and authenticity of the data.

Result

This section presents the key findings of the study, focusing on three critical issues in Sambas Regency: early marriage, child violence, and stunting. It provides detailed statistical data and analysis on the prevalence and trends of early marriage, highlights the incidence and types of child violence, and examines the risk and prevalence of stunting among children. By exploring these areas, we aim to understand the scope of these problems and their implications for the well-being of children and families in the region.

3.1. Early marriage in numbers in Sambas

Early marriage is a serious issue that affects the health and psychological well-being of girls in developing countries. According to UNICEF and Indonesia's Central Bureau of Statistics, early marriage was relatively common across Indonesia from 2008 to 2015 (Wantu et al., 2021). In 2022, West Kalimantan Province had the fourth-highest rate in Indonesia at 12.84 percent. Even though the percentage of child marriages has decreased from 2018 to 2022, it still surpasses the national target (Peanta, 2023). In 2022 alone, there were 563 cases of marriage involving individuals aged 15–19 years in West Kalimantan (West Kalimantan Provincial Population and Civil Registration Office, 2023).

Sambas Regency stands out with high rates of early marriage. In 2021, the Sambas Regency Religious Court recorded 329 cases of early marriage and 158 marriage dispensations until July 2022. From January to August 2023, 262 children applied for marriage dispensations, including 131 boys and 131 girls (Kurnia, 2023). Jawai sub-district is notable, ranking second in marriage dispensation cases among the 19 sub-districts in Sambas, with a rate of 13.29% (Noftalina & Sulistiawati, 2023).

3.2. Cases of Child Violence in Sambas

Child violence remains a major concern in Sambas Regency. Interviews revealed that addressing violence against children is crucial for the region's goal of becoming a child-friendly area. Religious leaders have been actively educating communities to monitor and prevent child violence within families, communities, and educational institutions (Interview with S.A. Sambas Religious Leaders).

Data from the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection indicate ongoing child violence issues in West Kalimantan from 2021 to 2023, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Child Violence in West Kalimantan 2021-2023

No	Year	Number of Child Violence Cases	Information
1.	2021	368 cases	206 cases in households; 41 cases for ages 0–5 years; and 86 cases for ages 6–12 years.
2.	2022	378 cases	237 cases in households; 48 cases for ages 0–5 years; and 118 cases for ages 6–12 years.
3.	2023	347 cases	221 cases in households; 31 cases for ages 0–5 years; and 113 cases for ages 6–12 years.

Source: Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (<https://kekerasan.kemenpppa.go.id/ringkasan>)

This data includes incidents across 14 regencies and cities in West Kalimantan, with the majority of victims being girls. In 2021, 331 out of 368 cases involved female victims, and similar trends were observed in 2022 and 2023. Sexual violence is the most common type of child violence, followed by physical and psychological abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and neglect.

Specific data for Sambas Regency are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Child Violence in Sambas Regency in 2021-2023

No	Year	Number of Child Violence Cases
1.	2021	12 cases
2.	2022	40 cases
3.	2023	49 cases
Total		101 cases

Source: Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (<https://kekerasan.kemenpppa.go.id/ringkasan>)

In 2021, Sambas recorded 18 cases of sexual violence (Muare Satu Data Sambas, 2021b). In 2022 and 2023, the Sambas Regency Resort Police reported 56 and 55 cases of sexual abuse of minors, respectively (Suhendra, 2024). Interviews highlighted that in 2022, Sambas had one of the highest rates of child violence in West Kalimantan, with 36 cases of early childhood sexual abuse. Child violence occurs in families, communities, and schools, driven by factors like low levels of faith and sexual deviations among perpetrators (Interview with Dr. F, Head of the Sambas Regency Office of Women's Empowerment, Child Protection, and Family Planning, December 2022).

Religious leaders are working to prevent child sexual abuse by conducting community development and spreading religious messages in villages (Interview with S.A. Sambas Religious Leaders). An interview with a community member revealed that often the perpetrators of child violence are people close to the victims, like neighbors (NM Interview Sambas Community).

3.3. Stunting in Sambas

Stunting in early childhood significantly affects child development. Despite a decrease in prevalence from 32.6% in 2021 to 30.5% in 2022, the risk of stunting in Sambas remains high (Antara News, 2023). According to the National Population and Family Planning Board (BKKBN), in the second semester of 2022, 85,971 out of 146,804 families in Sambas were at risk of stunting.

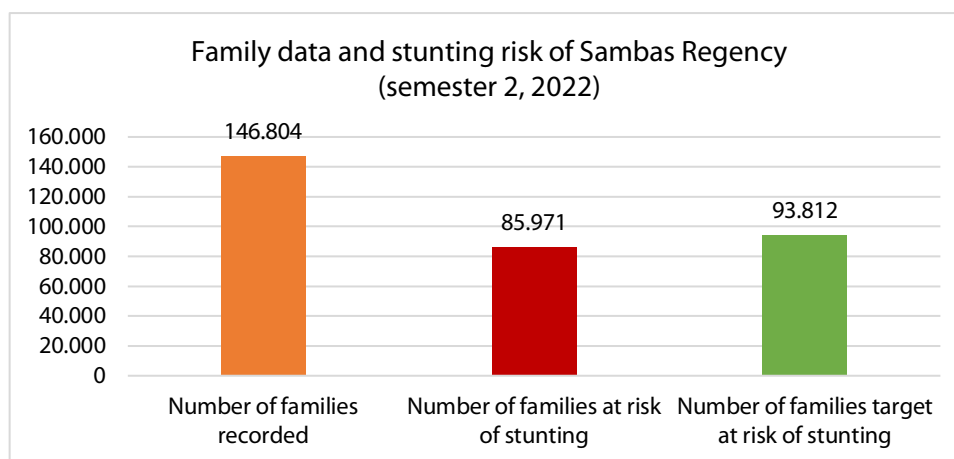


Figure1. Family data and stunting risk of Sambas Regency

Source: National Population and Family Planning Board

The data shows that stunting risk in Sambas Regency is still significant, despite a decreasing prevalence. Most sub-districts have a stunting risk above 50%. Urban sub-districts have higher stunting risks, while interior sub-districts near Malaysia, such as Paloh and Sajingan Besar, show lower stunting risks at 71% and 64%, respectively. East Selakau District, a non-urban area, also has a lower stunting risk at 58% (BKKBN, 2024).

The results highlight critical issues in Sambas Regency, including early marriage, child violence, and stunting. While the data presentation is adequate, the section lacks thorough analysis and interpretation, limiting the understanding of these issues' underlying causes and implications. Addressing these shortcomings will improve the clarity and impact of the findings..

Discussion

This study delved into the intertwined issues of early marriage, child violence, and stunting in the Sambas area, situated on the Indonesia-Malaysia border. These issues are not isolated; they are deeply connected, influencing and exacerbating each other. Economic hardship, lack of education, and entrenched socio-cultural norms are significant drivers of these problems (Wantu et al., 2021; Anggraeni et al., 2023). For families in Sambas, these challenges create a cycle of poverty and developmental delays that are difficult to break. Understanding these complex dynamics is crucial for crafting interventions that can make a real difference in the lives of these families.

The findings of this study are both revealing and concerning. Early marriage remains a prevalent issue, with West Kalimantan having one of the highest rates in Indonesia, reflecting a deeply ingrained cultural practice (Peanta, 2023). In Sambas, the number of early marriages each year is alarming, indicating the need for urgent intervention (Kurnia, 2023). Child violence, particularly sexual abuse, has also seen a disturbing rise, posing severe threats to children's safety and well-being (Suhendra, 2024). Meanwhile, although stunting rates have decreased slightly, a significant portion of families still faces a high risk, particularly in urban areas (BKKBN, 2024). These findings highlight the persistent and multifaceted nature of family-related issues in Sambas, demanding comprehensive and targeted solutions.

When we compare these results with previous studies, the significant influence of economic hardship becomes apparent. Early marriage is often a consequence of poverty, leading to educational discontinuation and perpetuating the cycle of poverty, as young brides are typically not prepared to contribute economically (Wantu et al., 2021; Berliana et al., 2021). This study supports the findings of Anggraeni et al. (2023), showing that early marriage negatively impacts parental knowledge and child nutrition, leading to stunting. On the other hand, Mavra Qamar et al. (2022) found no significant difference in domestic violence reports between early and adult marriages, suggesting that cultural differences may mediate these

outcomes. These contrasting findings underscore the complexity of these issues and the need for tailored interventions that consider local contexts.

The increase in reported cases of child violence in Sambas aligns with national trends, indicating that household settings are common venues for such abuses (Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, 2023). The rise in awareness and improved reporting mechanisms may partly explain the increase in reported cases. However, the predominance of sexual violence in Sambas contrasts with other regions where physical abuse is more common (Suhendra, 2024). This discrepancy could be due to regional cultural differences or varying effectiveness in addressing different types of abuse. These findings highlight the urgent need for targeted interventions to protect children and address the root causes of violence.

The study's findings point to the necessity of multifaceted intervention strategies. Economic support programs, coupled with educational initiatives, could help delay marriages and improve parental knowledge, thereby reducing child stunting (Ruslan Renggong et al., 2023). However, it is important to note that economic growth alone may not be sufficient; social and educational improvements are equally essential (Purnamasari et al., 2016). Additionally, addressing the psychological and social readiness of young individuals for marriage and parenthood is crucial (Gunawan & Bahri, 2023). A holistic approach that considers the various factors at play is needed to effectively address these issues.

Community-based strategies that involve local governments, religious leaders, and educational institutions are crucial for tackling these issues. Religious leaders, given their influence, can play a pivotal role in advocating for delayed marriages and better parenting practices (Turner, 2016; Noviansyah et al., 2022). Educational institutions can provide essential parenting education and support to young families, helping them navigate the challenges of parenthood (Karima & Kurniawati, 2020). These collaborative efforts are necessary to create a supportive environment for families in Sambas. Implementing these strategies requires coordinated action and sustained commitment from all stakeholders.

The implications of these findings are profound, necessitating integrated policy approaches that address economic, educational, and social dimensions. Policymakers must prioritize creating an infrastructure that supports family welfare from multiple angles, ensuring that interventions are comprehensive and sustainable. This study provides a foundation for future research and policy development, emphasizing the importance of collaborative efforts to enhance the quality of life in border areas like Sambas. The challenges are significant, but with coordinated efforts, it is possible to foster a healthier and more prosperous community. This endeavor will require the commitment and cooperation of all stakeholders, working together to break the cycle of poverty and underdevelopment.

Conclusion

The primary objective of this study was to analyze the multifaceted problems faced by families in the Sambas area, West Kalimantan Province, situated on the Indonesia-Malaysia border. The findings reveal persistent issues of early marriage, child violence, and stunting, each presenting unique challenges to the community. Early marriage rates remain high, with significant numbers of child marriages reported annually. Child violence, particularly sexual violence, poses a severe threat to children, with increasing cases predominantly occurring within domestic settings. Stunting continues to impede early childhood development, with high prevalence rates, especially in urban sub-districts. These findings underscore the need for comprehensive, integrated policy approaches addressing economic, educational, and social dimensions. Policymakers must prioritize holistic infrastructure development to support family welfare. Despite limitations such as reliance on reported cases and the study's cross-sectional nature, the research provides a foundation for future studies and policy initiatives. Future research should adopt longitudinal approaches and in-depth qualitative studies to understand the dynamics and causal factors better, while also exploring regional variations through comparative studies. Addressing these challenges requires sustained, multifaceted interventions and collaborative

efforts from all stakeholders to create a supportive environment for families, ultimately breaking the cycle of poverty and fostering sustainable development in border areas.

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