



## **An Analysis of Women's Persistence in Toxic Marriages**

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### **Abstract**

The study is to analyze the reasons women persist in toxic marriages, especially in premature cases of unwed pregnancies. The study uses a qualitative approach with a string of phenomena. The phenomenological approach seeks to understand human life events within the framework of thoughts and behaviors as perceived or interpreted by the individuals themselves. The subject of this study was "DS", a victim of domestic violence. The data analysis technique used in this study is data reduction. The result show that women's decisions to remain viable are based on considerations for the future of children, social and cultural pressures, and an understanding of religious values. Despite negative effects such as mental, physical health disorders, and a reduction in economic well-being, the informant still chooses to stay married. These findings show the importance of family support, early sexual education, and psychological assistance for women in the face of an unhealthy marriage. Social and religious backgrounds also influence early marriage which varies among communities.



## Introduction

Marriage is one of the most joyful events in many individuals' lives. It is generally expected to occur only once in a lifetime. In building a married life, commitment serves as a crucial foundation for its sustainability. Marriage in Arabic literature is referred to by two words: nikah (نكاح) and zawaj (زواج). Nikah (in Arabic) means "to gather" and "to unite." The meaning of nikah (zawaj) can be interpreted as "aqdu al-tazwiij," meaning marriage contract. It can also be interpreted as "wat'u al-zaujah," meaning sexual intercourse with one's wife.(Nurjannah, 2020)

As time goes by, long-standing marriages often face various forms of conflict. Moreover, each partner's true nature and character begin to surface, which can sometimes create a sense that the other person has changed. This situation can trigger new problems, as both parties must readjust to one another. In reality, no marriage is entirely free from challenges. However, when a relationship begins to show signs of unhealthiness, it is crucial for both partners to engage in open and honest communication. If such conditions are ignored, the unhealthy relationship may damage the very foundation of the marriage. This phenomenon is commonly referred to as a toxic relationship.

A toxic relationship refers to a condition in which the relationship no longer brings happiness to either individual. On the contrary, it generates ongoing negative emotions. Some common characteristics of a toxic relationship include excessive jealousy, a lack of security, habitual lying, belittling one's partner, a predominance of negative remarks, and a general sense of discomfort within the relationship. In toxic relationships, communication tends to be one-way, with excessive possessiveness, even demanding to know the details of each partner's activities. Furthermore, in toxic relationships, neither partner is given the opportunity to develop. However, when a couple is in a toxic relationship, we will observe toxic behaviors that are signs of an unhealthy relationship, such as discomfort in one partner, selfishness, and dominance from one partner.(Nadia Nurul Saskia et al., 2023)

The phenomenon of women choosing to remain in toxic marriages has increasingly become the focus of various modern studies, both in academic research and public discourse. In the disciplines of psychology and sociology, the term *toxic relationship* refers to interpersonal interactions characterized by patterns of behavior

that are emotionally, mentally, and physically damaging. Within the context of marriage, toxic relationships often persist over time, marked by imbalanced power dynamics, emotional manipulation, verbal and physical abuse, and even economic control. Social and cultural conditions in many communities, including Indonesia, still frequently place women in subordinate positions within marriage.

Issues arising within marriage have been widely studied by researchers. One such study examined the resilience of wives who were victims of domestic violence over the course of a seven-year marriage. The research described the experiences of three women who, despite enduring domestic violence for seven years, chose to stay in the marriage. The findings revealed that although they were victims, these women were able to achieve resilience through emotional regulation, empathy, sustained optimism, and the cultivation of positive personal qualities (Shafa Alistiana Irbathy, 2022). Second, *The Dynamics of Resilience in Wives Experiencing Domestic Violence During the Pandemic*. This study examined the dynamics of resilience in wives who experienced domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using a phenomenological approach, the research found that social support, inner strength, and spirituality played significant roles in the resilience process of these women (Ramadhani & Hayati, 2023). Third, *Resilience of Wives Who Are Victims of Domestic Violence: Factors Behind Maintaining Family Needs*. This study discusses the factors that influence the resilience of wives who are victims of domestic violence and choose to stay for the sake of fulfilling family needs. These factors include love, spirituality, children, social stigma, economic conditions, and social support (Ismalia et al., 2022).

While the three studies above offer valuable insights into women's resilience in the face of unfavorable marriages, there remains a major question regarding the reasons and long-term effects if such resilience is left unchecked by the individual. Therefore, this current research aims to uncover the underlying reasons why a woman who is generally perceived as the more vulnerable party chooses to remain in a toxic marriage environment. The researcher seeks to identify both the reasons behind and the consequences of resilience in women who are victims of toxic marriages, particularly its effects on their mental and physical well-being.

The purpose of this research is to educate the public to better prepare themselves for marriage, both materially and non-materially. Education about the ideal age for marriage is also important and the necessary preparation can also reduce the number of early marriages that often occur today. In addition, this article was written to urge readers to avoid underage marriage (early marriage). This emphasizes the need for understanding and collective action to prevent early child marriage due to its wide-ranging negative impacts, including health, education, economics, and psychology.

## **Method**

This research use a descriptive qualitative method with a phenomenological approach. Phenomenological research is a scientific inquiry that explores and investigates events experienced by an individual, a group of individuals, or a group of living beings. These events are often significant and become part of the subject's lived experience(Nasir et al., 2023). The phenomenological approach seeks to understand human life events within the framework of thoughts and behaviors as perceived or interpreted by the individuals themselves. Phenomenological research addresses ontological issues by aiming to gain a deeper understanding of reality(Nasir et al., 2023). It involves in-depth investigation of an individual or a group, in other words, it is used to explore and comprehend complex issues within real-life contexts. This study focuses on the mental health of the informants by examining in depth the impact of toxic marriages. In this context, a toxic marriage is understood as an unhealthy marital relationship characterized by poor communication patterns, dominance by one party, verbal and emotional abuse, psychological manipulation, and a lack of empathy and emotional support. This condition not only undermines marital harmony but also has the potential to cause significant psychological distress, such as anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and prolonged emotional trauma. Therefore, this study aims to explore the subjective experiences of the informants in dealing with the dynamics of toxic marriages and analyze their impact on their mental health. The results are expected to contribute to understanding the complexity of mental health issues in the context of marriage, as well as serve as a basis for formulating relevant preventive measures and psychosocial interventions.

## **Result and Discussion**

Result of this research divide into two part. First, a reduction data from interview. Second is the further explanation per sub-bab.

**Table 1. Reduction Data From Interview**

<b>Sub-Bab</b>	<b>Result</b>
Reason of Woman Resilience in Toxic Mariage	Based on data obtained by researchers, it was discovered that the primary cause or reason "DS" remained in a toxic marriage was the child factor. It was previously known that "DS" already had a child. DS believed that separating from her husband would have a psychological impact on her child. Furthermore, what "DS" did was solely to maintain the emotional and stability of the family, especially in her position as a housewife.
The Impact of Woman Resilience in Toxic Marriage	A toxic marriage certainly has significant impacts on "DS," encompassing both mental and physical impacts. "DS" also experiences economic impacts, as one of her neighbors reported that her husband is unemployed. The mental health issues experienced by "DS" can also lead to self-harming behaviors and even suicide.

The table presents findings from interview data regarding women's resilience in toxic marriages. It reveals that the main reason a woman, identified as "DS," chose to remain in such a relationship was her concern for her child's well-being, as she feared separation would negatively affect the child emotionally. Despite her efforts to maintain family stability, the impacts of enduring a toxic marriage are severe, including psychological distress, physical strain, economic difficulties due to her husband's unemployment, and serious mental health risks that may lead to self-harm or even suicide.

### **Reason of Woman Resilience in Toxic Marriage**

Marriage is a significant life event that affects a person's legal status. The Indonesian Civil Code (KUH Perdata) does not provide a specific definition of marriage. Therefore, the boundaries of marriage must be inferred from the provisions of the laws governing marriage. Marriage is one of the most influential factors in determining a person's legal standing. Through marriage, a legal relationship is established between husband and wife. If a child is born from the marriage, a legal bond is also formed between the parents and the child, as well as between the extended families of both spouses. In this study, several informants reported entering into marriage due to

premarital pregnancy. This occurred because they were highly vulnerable to risky sexual behavior, leading them to engage in sexual activity before marriage largely due to a liberal social environment. As a result, early marriage happened due to what is commonly referred to as “marriage by accident” (Sari et al., 2020). Social factors that influence this include the level of education and knowledge of parents and children, the family's economic situation, and belief in religious figures (kyai). Cultural factors that influence child marriage include matchmaking efforts by parents, the parents' desire to preserve the family line, the practice of witchcraft, and age manipulation, which is considered legal by society. (Rofika & Hariastuti, 2020)

Ultimately, such conditions often lead to unhealthy or *toxic* marriages. The word *toxic*, originally from English, is translated in the Indonesian dictionary (KBBI) as 'poisonous' or 'relating to poison.' Although *toxic* is not yet a formal psychological term, it has become widely used by the general public to describe unhealthy relationships. The term *relationship* itself refers to any form of connection or bond, including those within marriage, family, friendships, and society (Kdrt et al., 2024). A toxic relationship is generally considered undesirable when the connection between two people no longer brings comfort. This often leads to overthinking, emotional control, and mutual harm (Nihaya et al., 2022).

Unhealthy relationships are characterized by unnecessary jealousy, selfishness, childish behavior, dishonesty, belittling comments, negative communication, and a persistent sense of insecurity. Thus, a toxic relationship is a dysfunctional bond that often results in internal conflict, sadness, emotional tension, and the emergence of new problems. It can even lead to serious health consequences, and in extreme cases, death (Nihaya et al., 2022).

It is evident that the primary reason she has remained in a marriage full of conflict and has continued to stand firm in the face of all the challenges she has encountered is her child. If not for DS's deep maternal instinct, it is likely she would have divorced her husband by now. DS appears to be aware that divorcing her husband could have significant psychological impacts on their child. It is not uncommon for children to experience anxiety, restlessness, shame, and sadness as a result of receiving insufficient attention from both parents (Riaka Ayu Lestari et al., 2023). Divorce also

plays a role in the development of emotional and behavioral disorders in children. This, the researcher believes, is one of the main reasons DS feels responsible for preserving her household. In addition, she fears being judged by her neighbors as a disloyal wife(Rohimah et al., 2024).

Aside from concerns about the psychological impact on the child, what DS did as a victim can be seen as a way to maintain emotional and familial stability. As a mother, it is crucial to manage the pressures encountered in domestic life, whether they stem from family matters or professional responsibilities. Although there is no mention of DS having a job outside the home, her role as a housewife still demands a high level of management skills. Thus, even though her household can be likened to a ship with a broken engine, in the eyes of neighbors and others, they still appear harmonious and unaffected—thanks to the wife’s ability to control her emotions and steer the "ship" skillfully(Putri et al., 2024). This situation is further reinforced by DS’s internal conflict between wanting to end the marriage or prioritizing her child. The weight of responsibility on her shoulders is so heavy that she chooses her child over herself.

A healthy child is indeed a source of joy for any parent, especially a mother. Such a reality can momentarily suppress the inclination to separate. In DS’s case, her child and the child’s well-being were major factors contributing to her resilience. Resilience refers to an individual’s capacity to endure, recover, and adapt after experiencing hardship(Lidiawati et al., 2024). The resilience that emerged within DS gave her a glimmer of hope that, despite her marriage being on the verge of collapse, there were still small things to be grateful for and lessons to be drawn either for herself or, at the very least, for her child. Additionally, the presence of a “father figure” still played a significant role in shaping DS’s thoughts about staying in the marriage. She continued to believe that even if the “father” only existed physically and not emotionally, the idea of divorce could be postponed, and she could still hope for her husband to change(Nona et al., 2022). DS’s decision to stay in the marriage is not merely about love or pride; rather, it is a rational choice aimed at preserving the family and ensuring the psychological well-being of herself and her child, with the child remaining the central focus.

### **Impact of Woman Resilience in Toxic Marriage**

In general, the negative impacts of a toxic marriage environment are more profoundly felt by women. Based on interviews conducted by the researcher, the following is one of the most influential effects as shared by the subject:

“Like, my mental health was affected, then my physical health was slightly affected, and also... what else... my economic well-being too... yes, like that. Also, the well-being of my children too.”

In addition to the psychological impact on DS, such a toxic marriage also brings negative economic consequences. This was explained by DS's neighbor, identified by the initial 'I', as follows:

“Yes, it's true, Dela and her husband don't seem to be doing well. They say it's because the man is often violent. It's true that her husband doesn't work, he just gambles, and it's a pity for the children.”

A harmonious household is an ideal cherished by everyone, and DS is no exception. She was willing to endure the impact of her toxic marriage repeatedly physically, mentally, and economically. Her husband, who should have fulfilled his responsibilities as the head of the family and provider, failed to do so. He acted more like a child who refused to grow up and only wanted to play all day without any sense of responsibility. According to Avril Carruthers, people in relationships can consciously exchange energy with each other, both positive and negative. A person may unconsciously use the same phrases and even think the same things as their partner because of the connection they have.

A toxic relationship can occur when excessive worry about the relationship distracts someone from focusing on their daily life. Someone in a toxic relationship feels compelled to behave according to the other person's expectations, so their interactions are confined to a narrow emotional range. Toxic relationships can leave someone feeling stressed and restricted, and emotionally unstable. This can lead to self-destructive behaviors, such as self-harm, uncontrolled emotions, and even drug use.(Furqoniyyah, 2022) In DS's case, as explained by her neighbor, the husband's form of control was expressed through his neglect of the family. Spending time playing dominoes and refusing to work deprived his wife of economic power, leaving her no choice but to depend on him as the sole breadwinner.



**Picture 1. Interview With DS**

Beyond economic decline, DS also suffered severe physical and mental distress consequences that can be deeply damaging. Victims of domestic violence are highly vulnerable to trauma, depression, and may even be driven to extreme actions such as suicide (Meilinda et al., 2023). Women who experience domestic violence are also at risk of reproductive health issues and hormonal disruptions, including irregular menstrual cycles (Sutrisminah & Emi, 2022). The family's economic hardship also affects the growth and development of children. Limited financial resources hinder a child's ability to explore the world freely. They may develop trauma and depression, and the violence they witness can be unconsciously internalized and reproduced later in life, fostering aggressive and emotionally unstable behavior patterns (Sutrisminah & Emi, 2022). The domino effect could lead the child to experience poverty in adulthood due to the deprivation they faced growing up.

The physical violence inflicted by DS's husband also reveals the dominance of men over women. The phrase "raising a hand," as mentioned by a supporting informant, serves as a strong indicator of deviant behavior (Sutrisminah & Emi, 2022). Such deviance has long-term consequences for DS, including loss of self-esteem, fear, and dependence on her husband. Should she choose to separate from him, she would risk losing her primary source of livelihood. Consequently, DS finds herself trapped in a situation where any decision whether to stay or leave comes with significant consequences (Weaver et al., 2021). Marriages like this often lead to either divorce or infidelity. This is what happened in DS's household. Due to frequent conflicts and a lack of harmony, her husband eventually sought solace by engaging in an extramarital affair with another woman outside the family.

“Yes, dear, once upon a time, late at night, she (the victim) was screaming because she was arguing with her husband. Dela also once returned to her mother's house in Parenduan with her child because her husband was caught cheating on her on his mobile phone.”

It is no coincidence that toxic marriages negatively impact a wife's mental and physical health. This is because the consequence of unresolved conflict often leads to physical confrontation. Prasety notes that unhealthy relationships can lead to psychological disorders. Toxic marriages are also closely linked to economic issues, as such relationships often arise from financial unpreparedness particularly on the part of the husband. As a result, once the marriage has taken place, the husband may not know how to fulfill his wife's physical and emotional needs(Defriza et al., 2023). This lack of harmony, verbal arguments, and physical confrontations often drive one or both parties to seek emotional or physical release through extramarital affairs(Syafiyah et al., 2024).

From the husband's perspective as the party who committed infidelity, he had anticipated from the beginning that his marriage would be problematic due to the factors mentioned earlier. The stress he experienced, along with the behavioral gap between him and his partner, created an expectation gap that led him to view infidelity as an escape and outlet from the “hellish” family life he was enduring. He also failed to establish balance, freedom, and stability within the relationship. As a result, pressure built up. Poor communication further intensified this pressure, making it unsurprising that he sought solace in someone else(Shanti & Agnes, 2020). In addition, other contributing factors to the infidelity included economic hardship and a process of self-forgiveness within the husband(Panani & Pramulia, 2024). Through the affair, he hoped that the marriage, which he perceived as a form of torment, would come to an end—and that he and his wife would be able to face the situation with a sense of closure.

Everyone who enters marriage naturally hopes for a harmonious and fulfilling relationship. However, marriage is fundamentally a union between two individuals with different personalities, characteristics, family backgrounds, and personal issues. Therefore, it is not surprising that, in reality, married life often falls short of the idealized, romantic expectations of the couple. Daily problems, combined with each partner's unique traits, can make married life feel difficult and emotionally unfulfilling.

Such conditions can create opportunities for marital discord, which may eventually lead to infidelity (Ardha & Justicia, 2022). Given the increasing number of early marriages and domestic violence cases, it is essential to consider multiple aspects related to marriage and domestic violence moving forward. This includes the need for educational outreach, economic empowerment of families, social awareness campaigns, counseling services, and legal support.

## **Conclusion**

Marriage is a sacred union. However, marriages that take place before the ideal age often due to premarital pregnancy frequently result in unhealthy or toxic relationships. Such relationships are characterized by conflict, excessive crises, selfishness, dishonesty, and a persistent sense of insecurity, all of which negatively impact mental and physical health, as well as overall well-being, particularly for women. Many women choose to remain in high-conflict marriages for the sake of their children's future, even at the expense of their own happiness and health. A socially unsupportive and pressure-filled environment further exacerbates the situation, making women more vulnerable to psychological disorders and a general decline in quality of life.

## **Suggestion**

To address early marriage and unhealthy relationships, it is essential to provide comprehensive sexual and moral education from an early age, so that adolescents understand the risks of promiscuity. Families must also serve as open and supportive environments. For women trapped in toxic marriages, psychological and social support is crucial to maintaining mental health and overall well-being. The government should strengthen regulations regarding the minimum legal age for marriage and enhance protections for women and children. Additionally, religious values should be genuinely implemented in daily life to help build healthy and harmonious households.

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