

## Research Paper

# Hopes, Fears, and Expectations of Indonesian Young Couples in the Pre-marital Process: A Socio-ecological Perspective



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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** The study reveals the emotional journey of a couple's marriage. Young couples' expectations, fears, and hopes in the marriage preparation process are crucial. Thus, this study aimed to identify hope, fear, and expectation of Indonesian young couples in the pre-marital process.

**Methods:** This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative process employed a phenomenological approach, which was carried out through in-depth interviews with 10 respondents, lasting 40-60 minutes each. Then, the Collaizzi method was used to identify the themes of important phenomena. Quantitative surveys were collected from 30 respondents. Data analysis in the survey involved processing the data and displaying it in the form of numbers and percentages to identify the frequency and percentage of expectation data. The research process was conducted from November to December 2024.

**Results:** In the qualitative research, there are two major themes in this study: 1) expectations before marriage and 2) fear of facing marriage. Key findings reveal couples' aspirations for harmonious family roles, economic stability, and emotional support, as well as their concerns about their ability to fulfil these roles, financial stability, and commitment uncertainty. In the quantitative survey, there were 44.6% expectations for commitment, 27.7% for economic stability, 16.6% readiness for mental, spiritual, and financial support, and 11.1% for marriage preparation support.

**Conclusion:** Social views significantly impact the premarital expectations, fears, and hopes of young couples. Young couples who are committed to long-term economic stability and can effectively manage their emotions are expected to minimize fear and worry related to marriage. Additionally, premarital education may be necessary for both the community and young couples before marriage.

**Keywords:** Marriage, Fear, Hope, Economic condition

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## Introduction

Marriage is a crucial stage in life that brings new expectations and challenges for couples, especially those who are young. According to data from the [National Population and Family Planning Agency](#) in Indonesia in 2022, the number of early marriages in Indonesia is on the rise, with young couples facing numerous emotional and financial challenges in preparing for family life. Although marriage at a young age can provide rich life experiences, emotional, economic, and social preparedness often affects the quality of married life [1, 2]. 12 subcategories, 4 sub-categories, and 2 main categories were extracted from the data analysis. Negative consequences of early marriage include: 1-physical and psychological problems (high-risk pregnancy and childbirth, physical illnesses, depression, and emotional distress. Many young couples have high hopes for a harmonious married life; however, there are also various fears, such as financial uncertainty, social roles, and effective communication [3].

Indonesian young couples often face fears and doubts regarding marriage, a phenomenon known as “marriage is scary”, which is influenced by a variety of factors, including exposure to negative stories, such as divorce or domestic conflict, which lead to fears of marital failure, and a preference for personal freedom that is perceived to be limited by marriage [4, 5]. Concerns about economic stability and the ability to meet financial needs after marriage are also factors contributing to young couples’ fears, along with the prioritization of career development, which is considered more important than marital commitments, as well as negative experiences in previous relationships or observations of unhappy marriages in the neighborhood. These hopes and fears need attention, as they impact the quality of life (QoL) in a country [6-8].

Young couples tend to have more difficulty adjusting and often feel jealous of their friends and surroundings, especially when their friends are more successful than they are and their partners [3]. This indicates that young couples experience emotional pressure between each other. One of the reasons young couples marry is their expectation and desire to live happily with their partners. However, amid these conditions, there are many hopes they wish to achieve together, but given their young age, their emotional maturity is not yet fully developed, which increases the potential for conflict during marriage [4, 6, 9]. High hopes and expectations, when not

supported by favorable socio-economic conditions and emotional maturity, can lead to fears that are far from the actual conditions [6]. This condition is still rarely exposed by researchers; therefore, the hopes, fears, and expectations of young couples need to be explored more deeply so that parents and the government understand what information needs to be provided to young couples to support a smooth and harmonious marriage that lasts into old age [9].

This research aimed to explore the hopes, fears, and expectations that young couples experience during the marriage preparation process and to provide solutions using comparative methods in Southeast Asian countries to provide an overview of their readiness to enter this new phase of life. Understanding these hopes and fears can help premarital service providers design more effective programs to equip young couples, thereby supporting family resilience in the future [3].

## Methods

### Study design

This research was a mixed-method study. The qualitative research utilized a phenomenological approach to collect information about the fears and hopes of participants, conducted through in-depth interview techniques, with data analysis performed using Polit and Beck’s seven steps [10]. In the quantitative research, surveys regarding expectations were collected using instruments and then presented through distribution and frequency data analysis.

### Sample, time, and location

The study was conducted in Tegal City, Island of Java, Indonesia, from November to December 2024. The inclusion criteria for participants in the interview process were young couples who were planning to marry within the next six months. The qualitative research involved 10 participants.

In the quantitative research, 30 respondents were included as results from a survey instrument, with distribution and frequency data analysis performed. The inclusion criteria for this phase were couples aged 20 to 30 years, who consciously chose to marry, openly shared their feelings and hopes, and were willing to participate. The exclusion criteria included couples with mental health disorders or a history of unhealthy relationships.

### Data collection

When collecting qualitative data, the researcher began by discussing the location of the interview, and the researcher and participants agreed that the research would be conducted at the participants' homes in Tegal City for convenience. The duration of each interview lasted between 40 and 60 minutes per couple. The study prepared interview aids, including a tape recorder to record interviews, field notes to record non-verbal details, and a semi-structured interview guide to navigate the participants' hopes, fears, and views on marriage. Each participant was treated with the utmost respect, and they were provided with an explanation of the study before signing an informed consent form to participate, ensuring that their rights and dignity were upheld.

During the quantitative data collection, the researcher surveyed 30 young couples to ascertain their expectations.

### Data analysis

Data analysis in this qualitative study utilized the Colaizzi method to describe the meaning of an experience [10]. The Colaizzi method is straightforward to implement in the analysis [11]. The process for identifying themes of a phenomenon consists of seven stages: 1) Rereading all interview data and field notes repeatedly to gain a complete understanding of the content in the interview results without adding personal assumptions from the researcher; 2) The researcher examines the data and creates a list of specific and significant questions about the phenomenon presented by each participant; 3) The researcher articulates the meaning of each specific and significant question by selecting keywords; 4) The researcher groups the keywords into categories and themes, examining the original data to validate the grouping and noting differences between groups to avoid potential misclassifications of data or themes; 5) The researcher combines the results into a description based on the compiled themes; 6) The researcher formulates a comprehensive description of the phenomenon being studied in the form of clear statements and a basic structure; 7) The researcher validates the thematic findings with participants to ensure they accurately reflect the conditions experienced by the participants.

In the qualitative research, data saturation was reached when the collected data were sufficient to draw necessary conclusions, and further data collection would not yield additional valuable insights. Data analysis in this study was done manually. The interviewer ensured that the opinions expressed were genuine, as they fully un-

derstood the content and were aware of the data needed to answer the research questions. Informed consent was provided to the researcher to ensure that no information was added or omitted. Information was obtained using open coding.

In the quantitative research, data analysis involved describing and processing the data, which was then presented in the form of numbers and percentages for the survey results. There were 12 questions designed to identify commitment, economic factors, emotional aspects, and support, with each category consisting of 3 questions.

## Results

In the qualitative research, the number of participants interviewed to reach data saturation was 10 couples, allowing the data collection process to be carried out comprehensively. Data saturation occurs when no additional information is provided by other respondents, or when the data obtained has already been shared by previous respondents. The characteristics of the participants are shown in Table 1.

### Research themes and subthemes

Each respondent's significant answers related to information about hopes and fears were sorted and extracted into categories and themes. The researcher examined the original data to validate the grouping and noted differences between groups to avoid potential misclassification of data or themes. The themes and subthemes are presented below.

#### Expectations before marriage

This theme reveals the hopes of young couples for life after marriage. There are two main subthemes:

##### Subtheme 1: Expectations of the role as husband/wife

Young couples expressed their hope that they could effectively fulfill their roles as life partners. Some participants hoped to support their partners, assist each other with household chores, and take care of the family together.

"I hope that after getting married, I can be a wife who supports my husband's career and can build a harmonious family" (Participants [Ps] 4 and 5).

"I want to be a reliable husband and partner to my wife in everything (P3).

Table 1. Participants' characteristics

No.	Age (y)	Education	Occupation	Engagement Length (m)	Salary (Million Rupiah)
1	25	Bachelor's degree	Non-governmental	5	3-5
2	28	Senior high school	Businessman	8	>5
3	23	Bachelor's degree	Governmental	3	3-5
4	27	Diploma	Non-governmental	9	3-5
5	29	Senior high school	Businessman	4	>5
6	24	Bachelor's degree	Non-governmental	5	3-5
7	26	Senior high school	Businessman	6	>5
8	25	Bachelor's degree	Non-governmental	7	3-5
9	30	Control	Governmental	7	3-5
10	23	Diploma	Non-governmental	4	3-5



"As husbands, we must always accompany our wives whenever and wherever" (P6).

#### Subtheme 2: Economic life expectancy

Many couples expect financial stability to support their married life. They hope to buy their own home and better plan their finances.

"We are saving to buy a house and start living independently" (P8).

"So, we are trying to manage our expenses from now on." (P7).

"Without strong finances, how can we live together in harmony?" (P9).

#### Fear of facing marriage

This theme depicts the common fears experienced by young couples before marriage.

#### Subtheme 1: Expectations of the role as husband/wife

Young couples expressed their hope that they could effectively fulfill their roles as life partners. Some participants hoped to support their partners, assist each other with household chores, and take care of the family together.

"I hope that after getting married, I can be a wife who supports my husband's career and can build a harmonious family" (P4 and P5).

"I want to be a reliable husband and partner to my wife in everything (P3).

"As husbands, we must always accompany our wives whenever and wherever" (P6).

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"Without strong finances, how can we live together in harmony?" (P9).

The survey of the quantitative research is shown in Table 2. The findings from the survey questions were developed based on the results of qualitative research, comprising 13 questions. This study identified 44.6% hope for commitment, 27.7% hope for economic stability, 16.6% hope for emotional support, and 11.1% hope for general support.

Table 2. Research findings

Socio-ecological Theory	Element	Research Findings
Individual	Hope reflects inner determination in stabilizing a marriage.	<p>Personal desires for an ideal home life are shaped by individual values of harmonious relationships and mutual support.</p> <p>Establishing close partnerships and harmonious cooperation in the household requires a sense of comfort, security, and achievement in life.</p> <p>To achieve a harmonious relationship with your partner, you need to know your partner deeply, understand his/her needs, and be someone who is always there for him/her. Mutual understanding, communication, and empathy are essential.</p> <p>Self-awareness aimed at personal improvement is the key to a successful relationship and to providing an ideal life.</p>
Interpersonal	<p>Solid financial hope creates an ideal life for children.</p> <p>Hope for a life partner means guiding one another to play an active role in each other's success—both physically and mentally—while providing emotional support and motivation.</p>	<p>Being a trusted figure for one's spouse adds deep meaning to the marriage and fosters a desire for greater independence, a decent living environment, and responsible future planning through effective financial management to stabilize the economy.</p> <p>Addressing family needs, particularly with new responsibilities after having children, ensures that children grow up in a comfortable environment and have their physical, educational, and health needs met.</p> <p>Managing financial risks to address long-term challenges in family financial management—such as saving for education, health, or unexpected needs—is aligned with the family's vision.</p> <p>Building an equal relationship, where husband and wife support each other in all aspects of life, including emotional well-being, work, and childcare, defines the success of a marriage.</p> <p>Giving one's best in marriage embodies how a good wife or husband should behave in terms of emotional support, responsibility, and commitment.</p>
Public	To create a harmonious family environment, we need support and motivation.	<p>Before marriage, couples should be able to resolve conflicts maturely and healthily, without drama or prolonged disputes.</p> <p>When one partner makes a mistake, it is beneficial for the other to take an active role in providing motivation and support.</p> <p>A trusted figure in decision-making helps build an equal relationship essential for starting a new life, along with the need for positive support from the extended family.</p> <p>Self-reflection is necessary for continuous development and learning to meet expectations and improve oneself to achieve the ideals of a partner.</p> <p>A strong sense of responsibility for a successful relationship, along with self-awareness aimed at personal growth, requires support from each other and from those around them who positively impact the couple.</p>



Sixteen young couples (44.6%) expressed hope for showing determination in stabilizing their marriage, which reflects a personal desire for commitment. Ten young couples (27.7%) stated that solid financial stability provides an ideal life for their children. Six young couples (16.6%) expressed hope for the success of the family by playing an active emotional and mental role, as well as providing motivation, which fosters an equal relationship. Four young couples (11.1%) showed hope for creating a harmonious family environment through support (Table 3).

The total number of respondents was 30, but the frequency of young couples' expectations was 36, as some respondents provided information about their expectations using more than one term. The researcher allowed flexibility for respondents to capture a comprehensive picture of the expectations among Indonesian young couples.

## Discussion

The data can be interpreted through the hopes, fears, and expectations of young Indonesian couples. At the beginning of marriage, the expectations of young Indonesian couples always lead to the image of happiness. To achieve these expectations, a deep understanding of one another is essential. Husbands and wives need to understand each other more deeply than they understand anyone else [12]. They must know their partner's likes and dislikes, habits that may annoy them, as well as each other's strengths and weaknesses, and the characteristics associated with those traits [6]. In short, husbands and wives need to understand everything about each other, including the less pleasant traits they may not reveal to others [6, 13].



Table 3. Frequency of young couples' expectations

No.	Element	No. (%)
1	Commitment	16(44.6)
2	Economy	10(27.7)
3	Emotional	6(16.6)
4	Support	4(11.1)
Total		36(100)



In fulfilling each partner's expectations, husbands and wives sometimes have different opinions, defend their respective views that they believe are correct, and attempt to justify their reasoning [14]. Disputes can arise over various issues, such as personality, finances, intimate relationships, extended family, division of household tasks, children, and other minor matters that may seem trivial upon reflection [2].

The division of roles based on gender is important to maintain balance in the family to achieve family goals. Husbands and wives need to reach an agreement on dividing roles and daily tasks, carrying out their respective responsibilities with full awareness, and upholding mutually agreed commitments [1, 3]. The division of tasks in the family requires flexibility so that couples can exchange roles or share responsibilities, both in managing household chores and earning a living. If the division of tasks and the implementation of family obligations are carried out in a balanced manner and based on mutual agreement, this will foster a harmonious married life and serve as an indicator of success in marital adjustment [15].

Today, women's roles are expanding and are no longer limited to domestic affairs, such as housekeeping, mattresses, wells, and kitchens [16]. Many women now work in the economic sector to help increase family income, taking on jobs in offices, factories, and markets, as well as occupying important positions in the public sector as regents, mayors, governors, or even heads of state [17]. The number of women involved in earning a living continues to increase, but this often creates an imbalance in roles. Women must manage two sectors simultaneously: the economy and the public sector, while still being responsible for domestic affairs [16]. This concept of a dual role adds to the burden on women, particularly those who work outside the home. Therefore, it would be more ideal for the roles of husband and wife to be viewed as "household managers," with a fairer division

of tasks. The husband can assist with domestic responsibilities, while the wife can also engage in the public sector, according to needs and mutual agreements. Supporting research includes narratives from participants that align with this perspective [8].

From the interview results above, it can be interpreted that many couples expect financial stability to support their household life. They hope to buy their own house and plan their finances better [18]. A woman's financial condition can affect how she makes decisions about marriage. Having a middle to upper economic status can often trigger internal conflict. In addition to earning an income, many women also desire a life that is beneficial for their family and others. In marriage, finances are an important factor; without adequate financial support, it is difficult to build an ideal household [19]. When deciding to get married, individuals tend to consider the future as a whole, including what they want to achieve together. Many women do not want to be completely dependent on their partners and want financial independence as a provision for the future. However, financial readiness must be complemented by strong mental readiness. Mental readiness, both emotionally and psychologically, is important in building a married life. If someone is not fully ready, this can trigger trauma and deep concerns about the relationship in marriage [14, 20, 21]. Therefore, financial and mental readiness are the main keys to avoiding fear and building a harmonious household [14].

From the interview results above, it can be interpreted that some couples need to find out whether they can fulfil their roles as good husbands/wives, especially in dealing with the responsibilities and challenges of the household. Individuals must possess marriage readiness, which will positively influence themselves and their marital relationships [18]. Individuals in early adulthood have the developmental task of building relationships with the opposite sex and subsequently forming a family with their partner [20]. The process of building a family

certainly requires a marriage stage, which is not a simple matter, as individuals need to be prepared for marriage. A high level of marriage readiness is expected to help individuals be more equipped to face the responsibilities and roles in married life [21, 22].

This is also related to the reduction of fear of commitment felt by individuals in establishing relationships with their partners [12]. When someone has emotional readiness to build a marriage, he or she will be able to share life with his or her partner without fear. Individuals who are not ready to manage emotions and responsibilities in relationships tend to experience fear of commitment, avoid serious relationships, and worry about relationship failure [6].

In addition to the emotional aspect, changes in social status in marriage are also factors that need to be prepared for, as they often cause certain fears. Adults understand that marriage brings a new status as a husband, wife, or parent. For those who experience fear of commitment, this new status may be seen as a limitation of freedom and an obstacle to self-development [13]. However, individuals who are ready to marry will be able to adjust to these new responsibilities and roles and see them as opportunities to grow and develop together with their partner in a marriage relationship. For this reason, before proceeding to marriage, we need to recognize the importance of being ready for marriage to avoid what is commonly referred to as fear of commitment [23].

The interview results above can be interpreted through financial capabilities after marriage, especially in meeting household needs and planning for the future of children. Premarital education is necessary to stabilize finances [2]. There is a need for higher education to secure employment and achieve financial stability. Education plays a crucial role in shaping individual views and behavior, including those related to marriage. Through education, a person can gain a deeper understanding of the importance of marrying at a more mature age and become aware of the risks that can arise from entering marriage without preparation [24]. This understanding encompasses various aspects, such as finances, responsibilities in marriage, and the significance of preparing oneself physically and mentally before starting married life [24, 25].

Regarding financial concerns after marriage, this relates back to each individual's belief that sustenance has been determined by Allah. Although financial capital is important, sufficient understanding and knowledge about the meaning and purpose of marriage are the main

aspects that must be learned [25]. In addition, readiness for mental, spiritual, and financial support is also necessary, as these three elements are important foundations for couples preparing to marry. With this readiness, couples can build a family that is full of love and harmony, broad-minded, and capable of maintaining family stability [24]. It is important for individuals who are planning to marry to pay attention to religious values and prepare adequately to build a good future with their prospective partner. This preparation will help them face various challenges and maintain stability in their household life. Marriage preparation is a crucial aspect that must be considered before entering married life [2, 19, 23]. This includes various elements, such as determining a place to live, dividing responsibilities between husband and wife, and financial planning [26]. For this reason, thorough preparation before getting married is essential; we must conduct financial planning to prevent conflicts [24]. There may be potential biases in self-reported fears or issues related to the small sample's representativeness. Moreover, due to the diversity of cultures in Indonesia and the vastness of the region, this sample size may not represent the entire population of young couples in Indonesia.

## Conclusion

According to this study, social views have a significant impact on the premarital expectations, fears, and hopes of young couples. Moreover, based on the survey and in-depth interview results for young couples who are committed to the long term, economic stability and emotional control are essential. The need for premarital education and support is expected to minimize the fears and worries of young couples who wish to get married. Premarital education may be beneficial for both the community and young couples before marriage.

## Ethical Considerations

### Compliance with ethical guidelines

This study was approved by the Health Research Ethics Committee of [Muhammadiyah Purwokerto University](#), Purwokerto, Indonesia (Code: KEPK/UMP/147/XI/2024) on November 20, 2024, as well as permission from the relevant agencies. All participants provided written consent to participate in this study. The researcher also ensured the confidentiality of their identities. Along with the written consent form, information related to the purpose of the study was provided, and it was emphasized that their involvement in the study was voluntary and that there would be no penalty for withdrawal.

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## Authors' contributions

Conceptualization: Elqy Mei Zumaro, Okta Zenita Siti Fatimah, and Ratna Dewi Handayani; Methodology: Elqy Mei Zumaro, Okta Zenita Siti Fatimah, Ratna Dewi Handayani, Fitriana Rakhimah, and Nilatul Izah; Data collection: Elqy Mei Zumaro and Fitriana Rakhimah; Data analysis: Seventina Nurul Hidayah, Nayandra Keysha, and Wirawan Adikusuma; Investigation: Nayandra Keysha and Wirawan Adikusuma; Writing the original draft: Elqy Mei Zumaro and Fitriana Rakhimah; Review and editing: Nilatul Izah, Satriya Pranata, Nayandra Keysha, and Wirawan Adikusuma; Funding administration: Elqy Mei Zumaro and Fitriana Rakhimah; Supervision: Fitriana Rakhimah, Nilatul Izah, Seventina Nurul Hidayah, and Satriya Pranata.

## Conflict of interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

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