

## A Narrative Study On Anxiety And Learned Helplessness among Adolescents in Forced Marriages

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### ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji pengalaman ketidakberdayaan dan kecemasan yang dialami oleh remaja perempuan yang mengalami pernikahan paksa. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain kualitatif naratif. Informan yang dilibatkan dalam penelitian ini sebanyak tiga orang remaja yang dipaksa menikah di salah satu Desa di Provinsi Jambi. Peneliti melakukan wawancara yang mendalam terhadap tiga informan dalam beberapa kali pertemuan. Data yang dikumpulkan selanjutnya peneliti analisis dengan menggunakan analisis tematik. Tudi ini mengidentifikasi tiga indikator utama ketidakberdayaan: perasaan tentang masa depan, kehilangan motivasi, dan hancurnya harapan. Temuan penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa pernikahan paksa memicu tekanan psikologis mendalam yang mencerminkan kecemasan eksistensial, relasional, dan struktural. Ketidakberdayaan tersebut dipengaruhi oleh faktor sosio-kultural, seperti internalisasi nilai patriarkal dan norma ketaatan terhadap keluarga. Penelitian ini menunjukkan pentingnya peran konselor dalam menyediakan ruang aman dan empatik bagi remaja untuk mengeksplorasi perasaan mereka, memproses trauma, dan mengembangkan strategi koping adaptif. Gejala trauma perkembangan dan disonansi kultural yang teridentifikasi menuntut pendekatan konseling yang sensitif terhadap budaya dan berbasis trauma. Oleh karena itu, diperlukan intervensi konseling yang bersifat partisipatif, sistemik, dan kolaboratif guna mendukung pemulihan serta pemberdayaan remaja dalam menghadapi isu pernikahan paksa.

**Kata Kunci:** Kecemasan, Ketidakberdayaan, Remaja, Pernikahan Paksa

### ABSTRACT

*This study examines the experiences of helplessness and anxiety experienced by adolescent girls who experience forced marriage. This study used a qualitative narrative design. Three teenagers, forced into marriage in one of the villages in Jambi Province, served as the study's informants. Researchers conducted in-depth interviews with three informants in several meetings. The data collected were then analyzed using thematic analysis. This study identified three main indicators of helplessness: feelings about the future, loss of motivation, and destruction of hope. The findings revealed that forced marriage triggers deep psychological distress that reflects existential, relational, and structural anxieties. The helplessness is influenced by sociocultural factors, such as the internalization of patriarchal values and the norm of obedience to family. This research demonstrates the importance of the counselor's role in providing a safe and empathic space for adolescents to explore their feelings, process the trauma, and develop adaptive coping strategies. The identified symptoms of developmental trauma and cultural dissonance demand a culturally sensitive and trauma-informed counseling approach. Therefore, to support adolescents' recovery and empowerment in addressing the issue of forced marriage, we need participatory, systemic, and collaborative counseling interventions.*

**Keywords:** Anxiety, Helplessness, Adolescents, Forced Marriage

### INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a physical and mental bond between a man and a woman in a sacred and holy union (Malisi, 2022). When both partners respect, understand, and help each other through life's obstacles, marital happiness and harmony will be achieved. The main pillars for achieving a happy and lasting relationship are commitment, trust, and effective



communication (Akbar, 2023). Good communication allows couples to freely discuss their needs, wants, and concerns. Furthermore, empathy and mutual understanding are essential for maintaining a peaceful relationship and understanding the other partner's perspective (Budi, 2023). Upholding trust creates a solid foundation that allows couples to help each other without suspicion and feel protected. Couples' emotional bonds are strengthened when they show gratitude to each other in both simple and grand ways (Verstaen et al., 2020).

Marriage is supposed to be a sacred bond based on love, trust, and mutual agreement between two individuals. Ideally, everyone is entitled to choose their life partner freely without pressure from any party. But in reality, not all marriages are based on mutual consent. In various regions and cultures, certain practices still disregard an individual's right to choose by forcing them into marriage for specific reasons. One practice that reflects this reality is the phenomenon of forced marriage. The phenomenon known as "forced marriage" occurs when a person is forced to marry against their will, often due to family, social, or cultural pressures (Hariyanto & Fakhurrrazi, 2024). Parents or other family members often decide to marry off their children, especially in the case of girls, who often lack the autonomy to choose their life partners (Karras, 2024). Economic problems, cultural customs that view marriage as an obligation, or efforts to maintain family honor are some of the causes of this phenomenon (Tifani & Rohmadtika, 2024). It is crucial to understand that forced marriage is different from planned marriage, where the person getting married has the final say even when a third party or family is involved in the process of finding a partner (Adkins, 2021). Therefore, two important stages in combating the problem of forced marriage are educating the public about individual rights, especially for women, and establishing a system that encourages free will in marriage (Budi, 2023).

In Indonesia, forced marriages (arranged marriages) among minors are still common. Based on the results of research conducted by Mahfudin & Musyarrofah, several causes of forced marriage include parental variables, economy, education, customs, and environment. Forced marriage has adverse effects such as infidelity, family disputes, and divorce (Mahfudin & Musyarrofah, 2019). Another study revealed that forced marriage has more negative impacts than positive impacts (Toriquudin, 2022). Adolescents who are forced into marriage can experience severe and prolonged psychological impacts (Izzah, 2021). Because they feel unprepared for the tasks of marriage and the uncertainty of the future, adolescents who are forced to marry often suffer from stress and anxiety (Liesmayani et al., 2022). They feel they have lost control of their lives and are trapped in a situation they did not choose; this stress can result in depression. They may also experience feelings of loneliness due to having to give up social interactions or relationships with their peers, which makes them feel even lonelier. Since the role they take on in marriage is incompatible with the self-discovery process they are going through, teens who are forced into marriage may also lose their self-confidence.

Forced marriage can in fact result in severe emotional distress, especially if physical or psychological violence is involved (Aulia & Mukrimun, 2022). If left untreated, all these effects can lead to long-term mental health problems such as depression, anxiety disorders, or post-traumatic stress disorder, which can later reduce their quality of life (Baraka et al., 2022). Adolescents forced into marriage can suffer from severe anxiety, which has a major negative impact on their general well-being. They experience anxiety due to uncertainty and lack of preparedness to deal with significant life transitions. Adolescents who are forced into marriage often experience grief because they are not provided the opportunity to choose a life partner based on their preferences or emotions (Munir et al., 2020). The fear of an unmanageable future often causes intense anxiety, whether related to the relationship they are forced into, changes in their social life, or sudden obligations they must face (Sari et al., 2020).



Moreover, these concerns are often associated with sentiments of immaturity or emotional unpreparedness for early marriage (Chantler & McCarry, 2020). They can feel trapped in a position they do not fully understand, which makes them more anxious about navigating the marriage, handling conflict, and meeting the expectations of their partner and family. Because they are forced to abide by others' decisions and cannot choose a partner based on compatibility or love, they often fear that their marriage will be unhappy (Nurchahya, 2021).

Adolescents forced into marriage may experience extreme anxiety, which significantly impairs their general well-being (Eprila et al., 2023). Uncertainty and lack of preparedness to deal with major life changes are the causes of their worries. Because they are not provided the opportunity to choose a life partner based on their feelings or preferences, adolescents who are forced into marriage often experience grief. Uncontrollable worries about the future often result in severe anxiety, regardless of the relationship they are in, the changes in their social life, or the responsibilities they suddenly have to face (Wati, 2023).

In addition, feelings of immaturity or emotional unpreparedness for early marriage are often associated with these concerns (Roupetz et al., 2020). They may feel trapped in a situation they do not fully understand, which increases their anxiety about managing conflict, navigating the marriage, and meeting the expectations of their partner and family. They often worry that their marriage will not be fulfilling because they are forced to follow someone else's choices and cannot choose a partner based on compatibility or love (Chantler & McCarry, 2020).

Marriage can also be considered a form of human rights violation that may lead to individuals, particularly women, feeling helpless in their married lives. In psychology, this helplessness is known as learned helplessness, a condition in which a person feels helplessness to change an adverse situation due to repeated experiences of pressure or coercion without a way out (McKean, 1994). When people, especially women, are not given the space to reject or choose their life partners, their self-esteem, motivation, and self-perception of the future become distorted. As a result, they become passive, tend to withdraw, and experience psychological disorders such as depression, anxiety, and prolonged trauma. A person who is forced into marriage without free consent loses control over her life choices, including reproduction, education, and economic independence. This creates prolonged dependency, increases the risk of domestic violence, and inhibits the individual's ability to develop personally and socially. This helplessness is not only psychological but also structural, as victims are often trapped in a system that does not provide space for complaints and adequate protection (Budi, 2023).

The purpose of this study is to investigate the dynamics of helplessness and anxiety faced by adolescents who experience forced marriage. With a better understanding of the psychological impact of forced marriage on adolescents, practitioners and politicians will be able to develop stronger solutions that will allow adolescents to follow their path in accordance with religious rules (Sujadi, 2023). This study is intriguing because it tries to analyze the feelings and experiences of adolescents in forced marriage situations that are not widely known, especially in Indonesia or in societies where early and forced marriages are still practiced due to strong traditions (Holid et al., 2021).

## **METHOD**

The method used in this research is narrative qualitative. Narrative assessment is an approach that focuses on exploring and analyzing individual life stories or experiences (Jelahun, 2022). We conducted the research on several adolescents who faced forced marriage. They were purposively selected for the study due to ease of access. Eligible



participants were contacted through in-person interviews. Pseudonyms were used for each participant to ensure high confidentiality, and their individual affiliations were not disclosed. They are O (19 years old), P (22 years old), and T (20 years old).

In this study we collected data through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. In the interviews, we asked the participants to tell their stories about their forced marriages. All interviews were conducted face-to-face. The interviews were conducted from February to March 2025. The semi-structured interviews lasted between twenty and twenty-five minutes for each participant. The researcher recorded, transcribed verbatim, and carefully analyzed and categorized all interview data.

The data obtained were thematically analyzed to identify patterns and relationships between themes that emerged in participants' narratives (Krickel-Choi, 2022). By triangulating the data and validating the narratives through member checking, this study seeks to maintain the credibility and validity of the findings. The results of the study are expected to provide a more profound understanding of the psychological impact of forced marriage on adolescents and inform recommendations for more effective interventions to support their mental health. In this study, the research used multiple data sources, methods, or theories to confirm the findings and ensure the validity of the results.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

#### *Helplessness*

This study explored helplessness among participants through three main indicators: feelings about the future, loss of motivation, and future expectations. The findings obtained from qualitative interviews with three informants illustrate how helpless adolescents are in the face of forced marriage.

#### Feelings About the Future

This study explains that adolescents who experience forced marriage often worry about their future. They view the future with feelings of pessimism, discomfort, and anxiety, as forced marriages appear to prevent them from achieving a life of hope. These fears arise because there is a feeling that they cannot control their lives and the worries they experience.

Informant 1 (O, 19 years old): *"My feelings currently are still uncertain because this marriage is not in accordance with what I wanted before."*

Informant 2 (P, 22 years old): *"I don't know how I feel currently because this marriage was our parents' wish. I'm just trying to be dutiful to my parents; I still put my feelings aside."*

Informant 3 (T, 20 years old): *"I am a little scared about the future of both of us, whether we will be a happy family or not."*

#### Loss of Motivation

This research explains that forced marriage can cause adolescents to lose motivation in life. They feel they lack the drive to pursue goals, do things they used to enjoy, or plan for the future. The anxiety arising from this situation makes them feel confined and helpless, so they tend to be passive and lose interest in things that previously gave their lives meaning or happiness.

Informant 1 (O, 19 years old): *"Until now I have had no motivation to do things that I like."*

Informant 2 (P, 22 years old): *"I now hate the things I liked in the past."*

Informant 3 (T, 20 years old): *"Yes, I am not motivated to do the activities that I really liked at that time because I think that my world can be managed by my parents, so it is useless to do these things."*



## Future Expectations

The research refers to the fact that forced marriage often destroys adolescents' future expectations. They feel they no longer have clear goals or dreams in life, as forced marriage is perceived as a major obstacle to a better life. The anxiety of a bleak future and the inability to change the situation make them feel pessimistic, as if all opportunities for happiness and success have been closed. This further reinforces feelings of helplessness and uncertainty about what will happen next.

Informant 1 (O, 19 years old): *"I still feel scared when I think about a future with someone I don't love but who is now in a marriage."*

Informant 2 (P, 22 years old): *"I imagine that my life in the future will be more controlled by my parents and my husband, so I don't have freedom over major decisions in life."*

Informant 3 (T, 20 years old): *"Until now I still can't imagine the future in this marriage".*

This study illustrates adolescent helplessness in forced marriage through three main indicators. First, feelings about the future indicate that adolescents feel pessimistic and anxious because they perceive forced marriage as a hindrance to their expected life. Second, loss of motivation occurs when adolescents lose their enthusiasm for pursuing their dreams or engaging in activities they enjoy, as they feel trapped in an unwanted situation. Third, the perception of forced marriage as a barrier to happiness and success shatters their future hopes. Statements from informants such as O (19 years old), P (22 years old), and T (20 years old) reinforce these findings, showing how forced marriage creates feelings of helplessness, loss of control, and uncertainty about the future.

## Anxiety

Anxiety in this study refers to feelings of fear, worry, or discomfort experienced by adolescents due to the pressure and uncertainty of facing forced marriage. This anxiety arises because they feel threatened, lose control over their lives, and are unable to change their forced circumstances.

### Anxiety after the marriage

After entering into a forced marriage, informants expressed deep anxiety about the future of their union. Fear of mismatched expectations, relationship uncertainty, and potential marriage failure were the main sources of anxiety.

Informant 1 (O, 19 years old): *"I am worried about the future, afraid that it will not match my expectations, and he is nervous that it will end in separation."*

Informant 2 (P, 22 years old): *"Yes, of course the worry arises because I am afraid of not being in line with his thinking."*

Informant 3 (T, 20 years old): *"Fear of terrible things happening in the future for both of us."*

Difficulty dealing with anxiety

The informants also shared that the anxiety they experienced was difficult to overcome. Feelings of confusion, loss of control, and difficulty in managing emotions are psychological challenges that continue to overshadow their lives after the forced marriage.

Informant 1 (O, 19 years old): *"Yes, currently I find it difficult not to feel anxious in this marriage."*

Informant 2 (P, 22 years old): *"I am still confused about what is happening in my life. The anxiety about this life always appears in my mind, making me lose my sense of calm."*

Informant 3 (T, 20 years old): *"It is very difficult for me not to worry about this marriage."*

Aspects of worry after marriage



The anxiety felt by informants is not only general but also covers various aspects of married life, such as happiness, household responsibilities, incompatibility of principles, and anxiety about the inability to fulfill the role of a spouse.

Informant 1 (O, 19 years old): *"I am worried about the happiness of this marriage, about responsibilities, and about the economy."*

Informant 2 (P, 22 years old): *"There are many things that I worry about, one of which is whether I am able to fully fulfill my obligations as his wife."*

Informant 3 (T, 20 years old): *"I am worried about the possibility of ending this marriage due to significant differences in our principles."*

Difficulty settling down after marriage

Marriage that was not based on personal will caused the informants to lose their inner peace. The pressure of life, the feeling of having no control, and the excessive demands made them feel far from emotional comfort.

Informant 1 (O, 19 years old): *"Yes, it is very difficult; there are too many demands in my life that I have to fulfill."*

Informant 2 (P, 22 years old): *"Until now I find it difficult to feel calm in this marriage. I am not in charge of my happiness."*

Informant 3 (T, 20 years old): *"The word 'calm is almost lost in my mind because of the many anxieties that arise, and I even miss the calmness that I once felt."*

The informants experienced difficulty focusing because they were preoccupied with thoughts about marriage.

Difficulty focusing due to thinking about marriage

The constant anxiety and restlessness made it difficult for the informants to concentrate. Their minds are often filled with worries about marriage, especially when they are in a calm atmosphere or when dealing with authority figures such as parents.

Informant 1 (O, 19 years old): *"Yes, that's right. Feelings of anxiety often arise when I am sitting alone."*

Informant 2 (P, 22 years old): *"I don't always feel anxious. I only feel anxious when I am around my parents. I fear regulation and force in all aspects of my life."*

Informant 3 (T, 20 years old): *"Yes, of course the anxiety always arises when I am contemplating or relaxing in the afternoon."*

Feeling irritable

Emotional instability after a forced marriage makes informants more sensitive. Small things that may be common in household interactions become triggers for offense due to unchanneled inner pressure.

Informant 1 (O, 19 years old): *"Yes, I am effortlessly offended, like when he jokes by saying I am ugly."*

Informant 2 (P, 22 years old): *"I am a little irritable about small things. I was annoyed when he repeatedly pulled the clothes out of the cupboard, causing the arrangement to become messy."*

Informant 3 (T, 20 years old): *"Of course I am irritable after this marriage, namely when he buys something without my knowledge while I am not allowed to do such things."*

Feelings about the marriage's future

Thoughts about the future of the marriage continued to haunt the informants. The fear of a future that did not meet their expectations and the pressure to display happiness in front of their parents—albeit under duress—made them feel trapped in a role that they did not choose.

Informant 1 (O, 19 years old) stated, *"Yes, I am very afraid that my expectations will not be met."*



Informant 2 (P, 22 years old): *"I feel scared when my expectations do not match the reality of our marriage."*

Informant 3 (T, 20 years old): *"Of course, fear came to my mind. There were many hopes that I hoped could be realized in this new marriage, even at the expense of myself, to see my parents feel their children happy in this forced marriage without giving me the space to tell them about my disappointment with my biological parents."*

Anxiety in this study describes the feelings of fear, worry, and discomfort experienced by teenagers due to the pressure and uncertainty of facing forced marriages. O (19 years old), P (22 years old), and T (20 years old) expressed concerns about the future, such as fear of separation, incompatibility with their partners, and potential bad things that might happen. They also have difficulty feeling calm, are often restless, and are easily irritated due to the burdensome demands of life. This anxiety reflects their helplessness, where they feel trapped, lose control, and are constantly haunted by the fear of an uncertain future, disrupting their emotional stability and daily lives.

## Discussion

The anxiety experienced by adolescents due to forced marriage in this research is not only reactive but has developed into a deep and complex psychological condition. In the psychosocial development stages outlined by Erikson, adolescents experience a phase known as Identity versus Role Confusion (Laela et al., 2025). But this developmental process is actually disrupted by forced marriage. The effect is evident in O's (16 years old) statement, "afraid of not meeting expectations," which reflects an identity crisis. This belief is expressed by Adzima (2024), that adolescents often face an identity crisis when they feel unable to meet existing expectations (Adzima & Hisaaniah, 2024). This anxiety is existential in nature, threatening the future life projects of adolescents, as experienced by T (20 years old), who undergoes "loss of tranquility," an indication of prolonged emotional regulation disorders. Typically, this anxiety also manifests in somatic forms, such as hypervigilance symptoms exhibited by O (16 years old), who experiences "difficulty sitting still" and irritability. This finding is supported by previous research by Purnomo and Pulungan, which identified anxiety symptoms in several categories, namely as cognitive responses marked by confusion, affective responses including feelings of restlessness and impatience, behavioral responses observable through hypervigilance, and physiological responses (Purnomo & Pulungan, 2022). In the literature on developmental trauma, these symptoms are known as indicators of complex PTSD (Bahris et al., 2020). Unlike the normative anxiety commonly experienced by adolescents, the anxiety in this context is involuntary, persistent, and directly related to structural oppression systems.

Data shows the presence of three interconnected layers of anxiety: (1) Existential anxiety about the meaning of life is illustrated by T (20 years old), who expressed a desire to "return to the tranquility of the past." Reinforced by the research of Karunia et al., existential anxiety often arises alongside profound questions about the meaning of life, the purpose of existence, and the significance of our identity (Karunia et al., 2024). (2) Relational anxiety related to partner incompatibility, where O (19 years old) expressed "fear of ending up separated." Mau says that one of the greatest challenges in young marriages is emotional immaturity and a sense of incompatibility between partners. Those who are not mentally prepared often face difficulties in managing emotions and communicating effectively, which can trigger conflicts and misunderstandings and even lead to anxiety or depression (Mau, 2025). (3) Structural anxiety related to future economic prospects. This category has also been previously studied by Zaman; financial issues, such as unemployment, debt, or economic instability, can cause anxiety about the ability to meet basic needs as well as about financial futures (Zaman, 2024). The most prominent aspect is "temporal anxiety" focused on threats to the future, as stated by P (22 years old): "I don't know my feelings," which reflects emotional dissociation (low



emotional stability) as a survival mechanism. As Ahmad has noted that individuals with low emotional stability often struggle to identify their true feelings (Ahmad, 2022). This anxiety is described as "contagious," affecting various aspects of life, beginning with disturbances in daily activities, which O (19 years old) experienced as feeling "difficult to focus." According to Pitaloka (2025), anxiety can disrupt a person's cognitive functions, making it difficult to concentrate or even lose focus (Pitaloka et al., 2025). In social relationships, T (20 years old) reported feeling "easily irritated." According to Anggraeni et al., stress can cause someone to be easily irritated (Anggraeni et al., 2024). In the framework of Lazarus's theory, this anxiety arises from the "appraisal" of the inability to change the situation, leading to chronic stress. According to Nurliyanti et al., an individual's secondary appraisal involves evaluating their resources and abilities to handle the stressor, regardless of whether the stress is dangerous, threatening, or problematic (Nurliyanti et al., 2024). Interestingly, this anxiety also serves as a form of "resistance," a psychological signal that the situation is contrary to the developmental needs of adolescents.

Anxiety in this context reflects a pattern of "developmental trauma" that causes ongoing pressure on the psychological architecture of adolescents. According to Sinaga et al., developmental trauma encompasses all forms of trauma or stress that can be experienced throughout various stages of life, such as experiences of unrequited love, unwanted births, and various events that occur during dating, building families, and other dynamics (Sinaga et al., 2024). T's statement (20 years old) that "anxiety arises when reflecting" indicates the presence of intrusive thoughts, which is one of the typical symptoms of complex trauma. The "emotional piling" mechanism is also evident, where anxiety accumulates without resolution, as experienced by O (19 years old), who is burdened by various demands: social roles, financial worries, and threats to self-identity. According to Oktaviani and Krismono, Generation Z's anxiety about married life is increasing with the rising cost of living and economic instability, which are closely related to the future (D. Oktaviani & Krismono, 2025). This anxiety is further exacerbated by social isolation, where teenagers find it difficult to find a "safe space" to express their discomfort, as exemplified in T's (20 years old) statement reflecting the lack of space to share their stories. As explained by Sherlina, teenagers often feel frustrated and lonely. Without support from parents or relatives, they usually have no place to share their stories. As a result, they tend to keep their problems to themselves, which makes the burden they carry even heavier (Sherlina, 2024).

The helplessness revealed in this study reflects unique characteristics that can be understood as a form of "cultural learned helplessness." This is a condition where adolescents not only feel individually helplessness but are also trapped in a cultural value system that legitimizes that helplessness (Nursaidah, 2025). P's statement (22 years old), which mentions that "life is controlled by parents and husband," reflects the internalization of the patriarchal hierarchy that, according to Bourdieu's theory of symbolic violence, has been considered a natural fate. This phenomenon of helplessness is paradoxical: on one hand, teenagers like T (20 years old) are aware of the oppression, which she refers to as being "sacrificed for the sake of their parents." As Hasanah pointed out, financial difficulties sometimes lead parents to sacrifice their children by forcing their daughters into marriage (Hasanah et al., 2024). However, on the other hand, they develop "false consciousness" by considering this situation as a form of devotion, even though it can hinder their development. This viewpoint is reinforced by a study conducted by Manilet and Al Kindi, who state that false consciousness hinders individuals from realizing their true potential as themselves (Manilet & Kindi, 2024). These findings expand the concept of "learned helplessness" proposed by Seligman by incorporating a socio-cultural dimension, so that helplessness is not only an individual cognitive failure but also a result of a repressive social structure. This situation is further exacerbated by the absence of





"cultural scripts" that support the rejection of forced marriages in the communities that participated in this study.

The helplessness expressed in this study appears through four forms of manifestation: (1) cognitive surrender, where T (20 years old) stated, "I can't imagine the future." Oktaviani and Jamain explain that when the view of the future still feels unclear, individuals can experience future anxiety, which arises from confusion in planning their life goals (P. N. Oktaviani & Jamain, 2024). (2) the collapse of motivation felt by O (19 years old) with the expression, "There is no motivation." As explained by Sitompul and Noorrizki, the helplessness of adolescents can cause them to lose motivation (Sitompul & Noorrizki, 2024). (3) emotional withdrawal, as expressed by P (22 years old): "I set aside my feelings." Dewi and Yusri explain that helplessness can force our minds to continuously seek solutions to the problems we face until we neglect various other things, including our feelings (Dewi & Yusri, 2023). (4) behavioral passivity, as seen in T's (20 years old) statement, "The world is controlled by parents." According to (Karenina et al., 2024). Parents constantly strive to shape, regulate, supervise, and control their children in order to meet their expectations and desires. What is interesting is the presence of a "paradoxical agent," where there is a small effort to maintain control, as demonstrated by P (22 years old) through passive anger toward her partner. This was also mentioned by Pratiwi and Syafiq, that strategies to cope with psychological impacts in marriage can be done in several ways, such as avoiding and ignoring the partner, taking time to reflect or sleep, or suppressing and expressing the emotions felt (Pratiwi & Syafiq, 2022).

This study presents three main limitations. First, the sample only includes women, so the dynamics of men in forced marriages may not be well represented. Second, the specific cultural context, namely traditional rural areas, limits the ability to apply the findings of this research to more diverse urban environments. Third, the use of a retrospective approach has the potential to cause recall bias, especially related to traumatic experiences. Additionally, there are methodological limitations, such as the lack of data triangulation and the absence of member checks to validate the findings. On the theoretical side, this research has not fully explored intersectional dimensions such as social class, religion, and disability that can exacerbate conditions of helplessness. So, for future studies, it's important to use a long-term approach to track how anxiety and feelings of helplessness change over time, and to include young people in the research process as active participants.

## CONCLUSION

This research shows that forced marriage among adolescent girls is not only a social issue but also has profound psychological impacts in the form of anxiety and helplessness. Three informants in this study showed consistent patterns related to the loss of control over their lives, fear of the future, and neglect of their own emotional needs. The anxiety that arises is not only temporary but persistent, affecting emotional stability, peace of mind, and their ability to fulfill domestic roles. The helplessness they experience does not only stem from individual factors but is also a product of cultural and structural systems that normalize oppression. This helplessness leads to passive attitudes, low self-esteem, and a lack of hope for change, which ultimately reinforces the cycle of psychological suffering.

The findings of this research have important implications both theoretically and clinically in counseling practice. Theoretically, this research expands the understanding of anxiety and helplessness in the context of forced marriage, emphasizing the relevance of the learned helplessness concept, which explains how individuals who are continuously in uncontrollable situations tend to become passive and lose hope. From a clinical perspective, these findings call attention to a trauma-informed care approach in



counseling, providing a safe, empathetic, and supportive space for female clients who experience forced marriages. Counseling interventions need to focus on restoring self-control, enhancing self-esteem, and managing ongoing anxiety. Counselors also need to have cultural and gender sensitivity in responding to the psychosocial dynamics of clients, as well as collaborate with the community to provide support and advocacy. Group approaches can be an alternative to strengthen social support, and specialized training for counseling practitioners is greatly needed to effectively and ethically handle cases based on gender inequality.

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