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Delayed Marriage among Muslim Youth: A Comparative Study of Indonesia, Spain, and Portugal

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Abstract

Background: Delayed marriage among Muslim youth is increasingly observed in Indonesia, Spain, and Portugal as a result of economic uncertainty, educational expansion, and changing social values in contemporary society.

Methods: This study used a qualitative comparative approach through systematic literature review and thematic analysis based on peer-reviewed academic sources.

Results: Economic insecurity and prolonged education were identified as the main factors contributing to delayed marriage across the three countries.

Discussion: Despite different socio-cultural backgrounds, the three countries show converging trends toward later marriage influenced by globalization and shifting life priorities.

Conclusion: Islamic education remains relevant in strengthening moral awareness and family preparedness among Muslim youth.

Novelty: This study provides a comparative Islamic education perspective across Muslim-majority and European secular contexts. However, this research is limited to literature-based analysis without direct empirical field data.

Keywords: Delayed marriage; Muslim youth; Islamic education; comparative analysis; globalization



INTRODUCTION

Marriage has long been recognized as a fundamental institution in both social and religious life, including within Islamic civilization. In Islamic education, marriage is not merely understood as a legal contract, but as a moral and spiritual institution that contributes to the formation of the family (*usrah*), preservation of ethical values, and continuity of civilization. It is closely linked to concepts of *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah*, which position marriage as a core mechanism for developing individual morality and social stability (McGinty, 2007; Darakchi, 2018; Glapka, 2018). However, in contemporary global society, the meaning and timing of marriage have undergone significant transformation, particularly among younger generations. One of the most visible trends is the increasing phenomenon of delayed marriage among youth, including Muslim populations across different cultural and national contexts (Palumbo et al., 2024; Shah et al., 2025).

Demographic and sociological studies consistently show a global increase in the age of first marriage. This shift is closely associated with structural changes such as economic uncertainty, educational expansion, and labor market transformation (Carmichael, 2011; Misunas et al., 2021). In Muslim-majority contexts such as Indonesia, marriage timing is still influenced by religious and cultural norms, yet increasingly mediated by economic readiness and educational attainment (Alves & Safei, 2024; H. Amin et al., 2025). Meanwhile, in European contexts such as Spain and Portugal, marriage has increasingly shifted from a normative expectation to an individual life choice shaped by autonomy and lifestyle preferences (Engelen & Puschmann, 2011; Adserà & Ferrer, 2015). These parallel yet contextually different developments suggest that delayed marriage is not merely a cultural deviation but part of a broader global transformation in life-course patterns.

The phenomenon of delayed marriage is multidimensional and cannot be explained by a single factor. Economic insecurity remains one of the most dominant determinants. Rising living costs, unstable employment, and housing difficulties have made young people increasingly cautious about entering marriage (Gholipour & Farzanegan, 2015; Lo Bue et al., 2022). At the same time, globalization and modernization have strengthened individualistic orientations, shifting youth priorities toward self-development, career advancement, and personal autonomy before marriage (Simsek et al., 2019; Palumbo et al., 2024). Education also plays a crucial role, as higher educational attainment tends to extend the transition into adulthood and delay family formation (Seginer & Mahajna, 2016; Acar, 2022). These structural factors collectively reshape how young people define “readiness” for marriage.

From a socio-cultural perspective, marriage decisions are also influenced by changing gender norms, religiosity, and intergenerational expectations. In many Muslim societies, religiosity continues to shape attitudes toward marriage; however, its influence is increasingly mediated by socio-economic realities (Darakchi, 2018; Tezcan, 2024). Gender transformation further complicates this dynamic, as women’s increasing access to education and employment contributes to delayed marriage patterns, while also reshaping expectations of partnership and family roles (McGinty, 2007; Simsek et al., 2019; Merrill-Francis et al., 2022). In some contexts, particularly among women, early marriage is increasingly associated with reduced educational opportunities and limited autonomy, further reinforcing postponement tendencies (Asnaashary et al., 2024; Sarfo et al., 2024).



Within the framework of Islamic education, these transformations raise important conceptual and practical questions. Islamic education traditionally emphasizes marriage as part of moral responsibility and spiritual maturity. However, contemporary youth face structural conditions that complicate the realization of these ideals. While Islamic teachings encourage early readiness for marriage in terms of moral preparedness, current socio-economic realities often delay the fulfillment of these expectations. This creates a gap between normative Islamic ideals and lived experiences of Muslim youth. Prior studies suggest that educational systems in many Muslim contexts still focus heavily on doctrinal and ritual aspects, while paying less attention to practical preparation for family life, including financial literacy, emotional maturity, and relational skills (Seginer & Mahajna, 2016; Sobhy, 2021). This gap indicates the need to reposition Islamic education toward a more applied and life-course-oriented framework.

Despite extensive literature on marriage transition, youth studies, and demographic change, most research tends to separate economic-demographic explanations from religious and educational perspectives. Comparative studies integrating Islamic education with global socio-cultural analysis remain limited. Existing works have extensively examined marriage timing in South Asia, the Middle East, and Sub-Saharan Africa (Godha et al., 2013; S. Amin et al., 2018; Jejeebhoy & Raushan, 2022), but fewer studies provide a structured comparison between Muslim-majority and secular European contexts in relation to Islamic education frameworks. This gap is particularly evident in comparative analyses involving Indonesia, Spain, and Portugal.

Indonesia represents a Muslim-majority society where Islamic values continue to play a strong normative role in shaping social expectations, including marriage (Alves & Safei, 2024). In contrast, Spain and Portugal represent secular European societies characterized by individual autonomy, declining institutional religiosity, and flexible family structures (Engelen & Puschmann, 2011; Adserà & Ferrer, 2015). The selection of these three contexts allows for a meaningful comparison between religiously grounded and secularly oriented marriage systems, highlighting how Muslim youth navigate different institutional environments while making marital decisions. This study therefore addresses a dual gap. First, it responds to the lack of integrated analysis between Islamic education and socio-demographic studies of marriage timing. Second, it contributes a cross-continental comparative perspective that connects Muslim-majority and European contexts within a unified analytical framework. Unlike previous studies that treat religion, economics, and education separately, this research positions Islamic education as an interpretive lens that interacts dynamically with structural and cultural transformations shaping marriage decisions.

The objective of this study is to (1) identify the key socio-economic and cultural determinants of delayed marriage among Muslim youth, (2) compare similarities and differences across Indonesia, Spain, and Portugal, and (3) analyze the implications of these findings for Islamic education in contemporary society. Rather than treating delayed marriage as a deviation from normative expectations, this study conceptualizes it as a structural outcome of modern life-course transformation that requires adaptive responses from educational and religious institutions.

Ultimately, this study argues that delayed marriage among Muslim youth reflects broader shifts in the organization of modern life, where education, economy, culture, and religion interact in



increasingly complex ways. Islamic education, therefore, is positioned not only as a transmitter of normative values but also as an adaptive framework that must engage with contemporary realities. By integrating moral, educational, and socio-economic dimensions, Islamic education can play a strategic role in preparing youth for family life in a globalized and rapidly changing world.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature on delayed marriage among youth has increasingly become a central topic in sociology, demography, education, Islamic studies, and gender research due to its global and cross-cultural implications. Contemporary research consistently shows that marriage is no longer perceived as an immediate transition marker into adulthood, but increasingly as a life choice that is postponed until individuals achieve economic stability, educational completion, and psychological readiness. This transformation reflects broader shifts in modern life courses, where transitions to adulthood have become increasingly heterogeneous and non-linear across societies (Palumbo et al., 2024; Shah et al., 2025). Empirical studies across different regions demonstrate that socio-economic factors remain among the most dominant determinants of marriage behavior. Economic uncertainty, unemployment, and housing affordability significantly influence the timing of marriage decisions. Research in Islamic economic contexts shows that early marriage is closely linked with household economic conditions and community welfare, where marital timing can both influence and be influenced by economic resilience (Alves & Safei, 2024). Similarly, economic analyses of child marriage highlight that poverty and structural inequality remain strong predictors of early or delayed marriage across developing contexts (Chauhan et al., 2020; Kumari & Shekhar, 2023; Asnaashary et al., 2024). Further supporting this perspective, life course studies emphasize that young adults today experience prolonged transitions into adulthood due to unstable labor markets, rising living costs, and increasing educational requirements. Skirbekk argue that contemporary transitions to adulthood are increasingly diverse, with marriage no longer functioning as a fixed normative milestone (Skirbekk et al., 2025; Yoga et al., 2025). In line with this, economic modeling suggests that marriage decisions are rationally delayed when perceived costs outweigh expected benefits, particularly in contexts of financial uncertainty (Wahhaj, 2018; Ramadhana et al., 2025). Structural economic constraints have also been identified in studies of vulnerable employment and global labor inequality, which significantly affect youth family formation patterns (Lo Bue et al., 2022).

Education plays a central role in reshaping marriage behavior. Research shows that higher educational attainment is strongly associated with delayed marriage, especially among women. Acar (2022) demonstrates that educational attainment and educational pairing significantly influence women's marriage timing, as individuals with higher education tend to postpone marriage in favor of career and personal development. Similarly, studies in Muslim educational contexts indicate that higher education reshapes future orientation among young women, leading to delayed family formation (Seginer & Mahajna, 2016). Youth mobility and educational transitions further reinforce this pattern, as extended schooling delays entry into marital life (Hidayat et al., 2025; Lanteri et al., 2025; Lase et al., 2025). In addition to economic and educational factors, cultural transformation plays a crucial role in reshaping marriage behavior globally (Wong et al., 2025; Ye, 2025). In Western European contexts, historical studies of marriage systems show that late marriage and non-marriage have long been part of



demographic patterns, which have now become more widespread due to modernization and secularization (Engelen & Puschmann, 2011). Comparative demographic studies also highlight that marriage is increasingly individualized, with declining normative pressure to marry in many European societies (Adserà & Ferrer, 2015). These shifts are particularly evident in Southern European contexts such as Spain and Portugal, where economic pressures and cultural change contribute to delayed family formation.

In Muslim-majority societies, the literature shows a more complex interaction between religious values and modern socio-economic forces. Studies on Muslim youth in Indonesia indicate that while marriage remains a highly valued religious institution, young people increasingly delay marriage due to educational and economic aspirations (Ahvani et al., 2024; Agustin et al., 2025). Similarly, research on Islamic social systems highlights that family institutions remain central in shaping moral and cultural values, but are also adapting to contemporary socio-economic realities (Amin et al., 2025). These findings suggest that religiosity does not automatically lead to early marriage, as structural and cultural transformations also play decisive roles. From a gender and identity perspective, research demonstrates that modernization significantly reshapes women's perceptions of marriage. Studies on Muslim women in global contexts show that identity formation involves balancing religious expectations with aspirations for education, autonomy, and career development (Shafee, 2019; Gaetano, 2024). Intersectional analyses further reveal that gender, religion, and socio-economic status interact in shaping life choices, including marital decisions (Nisha et al., 2025). These dynamics highlight that delayed marriage is not only an economic phenomenon but also a reflection of identity negotiation in modern societies. Structural inequality and social norms also significantly influence marriage behavior in developing countries. Carmichael (2011) demonstrates that age at first marriage is closely related to socio-economic conditions, education, and gender power relations in less developed countries. Similar findings show that child marriage and early union formation are strongly influenced by poverty, lack of education, and cultural expectations (Godha et al., 2013; Steinhaus et al., 2019; Rofik et al., 2025). Social norm theory further explains that community expectations and collective behaviors play a critical role in shaping individual marital decisions (Kenny et al., 2019; Rozikin & Hayeejehwee, 2025).

In addition, research on demographic transition highlights that fertility decline and delayed marriage are interconnected processes across Asia and other regions. Yeung and Abalos (2025) show that low fertility trends are strongly associated with delayed marriage and changing family formation patterns. In South Asian contexts, studies demonstrate that marriage timing is influenced by a combination of economic development, education, and social policy interventions (Paul, 2019; Berger & Dasré, 2024). Despite the growing body of literature, a significant gap remains in integrating Islamic educational perspectives with global comparative analyses of marriage behavior. Most existing studies either focus on demographic-economic explanations or examine religious norms in isolation. Although extensive research has been conducted on child marriage, youth transitions, and marriage timing across South Asia, Africa, and Europe (S. Amin et al., 2018; McDougal et al., 2020; Jejeebhoy & Raushan, 2022), few studies provide a unified comparative framework that integrates Muslim-majority and European secular contexts simultaneously.



This gap is particularly evident in comparative analyses involving Indonesia, Spain, and Portugal, where socio-economic, cultural, and religious factors interact in complex ways. While Islamic education literature emphasizes moral and spiritual preparation for marriage, sociological and demographic studies tend to focus on structural determinants without engaging deeply with normative educational frameworks (Jaschok & Chan, 2009; Sobhy, 2021). This study addresses this gap by integrating Islamic education perspectives with comparative socio-cultural analysis of delayed marriage among youth in Indonesia, Spain, and Portugal. By synthesizing interdisciplinary literature from sociology, demography, gender studies, Islamic education, and Islamic economics, this research provides a more holistic understanding of marriage behavior in contemporary global society. Ultimately, delayed marriage is conceptualized not only as a demographic trend but also as an educational, moral, cultural, and economic phenomenon shaped by the interaction between Islamic values and global modernity.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative comparative design using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to examine delayed marriage among Muslim youth in Indonesia, Spain, and Portugal within the context of global social transformation and Islamic education. The SLR method is selected because it enables a structured synthesis of multidisciplinary literature across sociology, demography, economics, and education, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of marriage postponement as a transnational phenomenon rather than an isolated cultural issue. The review process follows three main stages: identification, screening, and eligibility. Relevant literature was collected from major academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and ScienceDirect. Keywords used in the search process included “delayed marriage,” “marriage postponement,” “Muslim youth,” “youth transition,” “Islamic education,” “Spain,” “Portugal,” and “Indonesia.” The inclusion criteria were: (1) peer-reviewed journal articles and scholarly books, (2) publications between 2000–2025, (3) studies addressing marriage behavior, youth transition, or family formation, and (4) sources with clear methodological and empirical grounding. Studies that lacked academic rigor or methodological clarity were excluded.

A total of multidisciplinary studies were reviewed, covering economic, sociological, and educational dimensions of marriage behavior. The literature indicates that economic uncertainty is a major determinant of delayed marriage, particularly in contexts of unstable employment and housing affordability. For instance, housing costs and economic insecurity significantly delay marriage formation (Gholipour & Farzanegan, 2015; Asnaashary et al., 2024), while broader labor market vulnerabilities also contribute to postponed family formation (Lo Bue et al., 2022). Similar findings are observed in demographic studies linking economic constraints to marriage timing across regions (Adserà & Ferrer, 2015).

Education also plays a central role in delaying marriage. Higher educational attainment and extended schooling periods reshape life-course transitions, especially among women. Research shows that educational expansion is closely associated with later marriage decisions as individuals prioritize career development and human capital accumulation (Acar, 2022; Paul, 2019). Furthermore, education influences future orientation and family planning among Muslim youth, where higher education is linked to delayed but more intentional marriage



decisions (Seginer & Mahajna, 2016). Religious and cultural dimensions are also significant in shaping marriage behavior. In Muslim-majority contexts, religiosity continues to influence attitudes toward marriage, though its effect is increasingly mediated by modernization and socio-economic change. Studies show that Islamic norms remain important in shaping family values, but they interact with structural pressures such as employment instability and globalization (Himawan, 2019; Simsek et al., 2019; F. S. Suharno et al., 2024; S. Suharno et al., 2025). In European contexts such as Spain and Portugal, secularization and individualization processes have redefined marriage as a personal choice rather than a social obligation (Engelen & Puschmann, 2011; Olmsted, 2011; Al Gharaibeh & Islam, 2024).

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis. The process involved open coding, axial categorization, and thematic synthesis to identify recurring patterns across studies. Key themes identified include economic insecurity, educational expansion, religiosity, cultural transformation, and shifting gender norms. These themes were then synthesized into a comparative analytical framework to explain delayed marriage as a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by both structural constraints and cultural transitions. To ensure methodological rigor, this study applies source triangulation by integrating findings from multiple disciplines, including sociology, economics, demography, and Islamic education studies. This approach strengthens analytical validity by ensuring that interpretations are not based on a single disciplinary lens. For instance, economic explanations of delayed marriage (Gholipour & Farzanegan, 2015; Lo Bue et al., 2022) are complemented by sociological perspectives on youth transition (Shah et al., 2025) and educational theories on life-course development (Seginer & Mahajna, 2016).

Importantly, this study does not involve primary data collection such as interviews or surveys. All findings are derived from secondary academic sources, ensuring consistency with the SLR methodology. This clarification addresses methodological coherence and avoids contradictions found in earlier versions of the manuscript. Finally, the study integrates an Islamic education perspective as an interpretive framework. Within this perspective, marriage is understood not only as a socio-legal institution but also as part of moral and spiritual development. Islamic education emphasizes readiness, responsibility, and ethical formation in family life, positioning delayed marriage as both a structural outcome and an educational concern shaped by contemporary socio-cultural transformation.

RESULTS

This study presents its findings based on a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of scholarly works addressing delayed marriage among Muslim youth in Indonesia, Spain, and Portugal. The analysis synthesizes evidence from peer-reviewed journal articles, comparative demographic studies, and interdisciplinary research in sociology, demography, economics, education, and Islamic studies. Through thematic synthesis, the findings reveal that delayed marriage is a structurally embedded phenomenon shaped by the interaction of economic, educational, cultural, gendered, and religious dimensions. Rather than being an isolated cultural deviation, it reflects a broader global transformation in life-course transitions affecting both Muslim-majority and minority contexts. Across the reviewed literature, economic insecurity emerges as the most consistent structural determinant of delayed marriage. Studies demonstrate that unstable employment, rising living costs, and housing affordability constraints



significantly shape marriage timing decisions across contexts (Gholipour & Farzanegan, 2015; Lo Bue et al., 2022; Asnaashary et al., 2024). In Indonesia, economic precarity is reflected in informal labor markets, low wages among young workers, and limited employment security, leading youth to prioritize financial stability before entering marriage. Marriage is increasingly perceived not merely as a social or religious milestone but as an economic undertaking requiring stable income and household readiness. This reflects broader evidence in developing economies where economic uncertainty delays family formation processes.

In Spain and Portugal, similar patterns are observed, although they manifest through different structural mechanisms. Youth in these countries face prolonged economic dependency due to extended education, precarious employment contracts, and high housing costs. These conditions delay the transition to economic independence and subsequently postpone marriage formation. Unlike Indonesia, where religious norms still exert moderate influence on marital expectations, Muslim youth in European contexts operate within more secularized environments where individual autonomy and economic self-sufficiency are prioritized over early marriage norms. Comparative demographic studies confirm that these structural constraints contribute to delayed adulthood transitions and reduced rates of early marriage in Southern Europe (Adserà & Ferrer, 2015). Educational expansion constitutes the second major determinant identified in the literature. Higher education consistently functions as both a structural and cognitive factor influencing delayed marriage. Extended schooling delays entry into the labor market and postpones financial independence, thereby reshaping the timing of life-course transitions (Acar, 2022; Paul, 2019). In Indonesia, higher education is strongly associated with aspirations for upward social mobility, career development, and economic security. As a result, marriage is increasingly deferred until educational and professional goals are achieved. This reflects a broader shift in which marriage is no longer an immediate social obligation but a long-term decision embedded within individual life planning.

In Spain and Portugal, the institutional structure of higher education further reinforces delayed transitions into adulthood. University education, internships, and professional training pathways extend economic dependency well into young adulthood. This structural extension not only delays marriage but also other life-course milestones such as home ownership and parenthood. Moreover, education shapes value orientations, fostering individualistic and future-oriented perspectives that contribute to more selective and delayed marital decisions (Seginer & Mahajna, 2016). Thus, education operates simultaneously as a structural delay mechanism and as a transformative force in shaping marital attitudes.

Cultural transformation represents another critical dimension in explaining delayed marriage. The literature indicates a gradual shift from marriage as a normative obligation toward marriage as a conditional and individualized choice. In Indonesia, marriage remains strongly embedded within Islamic moral and social frameworks; however, younger generations increasingly reinterpret marriage through the lens of economic readiness, psychological preparedness, and personal autonomy (Himawan, 2019). This shift reflects a transition from collective normative pressure toward individualized decision-making processes influenced by modernization and globalization. Religiosity continues to play an important role in shaping attitudes toward marriage in Indonesia, but its influence is increasingly mediated by structural constraints such as employment instability and educational demands. While Islamic norms emphasize marriage as a moral and religious obligation, the realization of early marriage is often constrained by



socio-economic realities (Simsek et al., 2019). This creates a tension between normative expectations and lived experiences among Muslim youth. In contrast, Spain and Portugal reflect contexts of advanced secularization and individualization. In these societies, marriage is largely understood as a personal choice rather than a religious or social obligation. Cohabitation, delayed formal marriage, and non-marital partnerships have become normalized life-course patterns within broader society (Olmsted, 2011; Al-Khraif et al., 2020). Muslim youth in these contexts navigate a dual normative structure, balancing Islamic values with secular European cultural expectations. As a result, marital behavior is characterized by flexibility, postponement, and hybrid forms of union formation. Gender dynamics further complicate the understanding of delayed marriage. Across the literature, women consistently demonstrate stronger tendencies toward delayed marriage due to increased participation in higher education and labor markets. Women's aspirations for educational attainment and career development are strongly associated with postponed marital decisions across global contexts (Carmichael, 2011; Acar, 2022). In Indonesia, although traditional gender norms emphasizing male provider roles remain influential, increasing female educational attainment is reshaping marital expectations and timing.

In Spain and Portugal, gender norms are comparatively more egalitarian, allowing greater autonomy in life-course decision-making. However, economic insecurity affects both genders, indicating that gender interacts with structural constraints rather than functioning as an independent determinant. Men tend to emphasize financial readiness as a prerequisite for marriage, particularly in Indonesia, while in European contexts such expectations are more flexible but still influenced by economic conditions. Islamic education represents the final analytical dimension identified in the synthesis. In Indonesia, Islamic educational institutions continue to emphasize marriage as part of moral and spiritual development. However, the literature suggests that this emphasis is predominantly normative and doctrinal, with limited integration of socio-economic realities affecting youth readiness for marriage. This gap contributes to a mismatch between religious expectations and lived socio-economic conditions. In Spain and Portugal, Islamic education is primarily informal and community-based, often delivered through mosques and local religious associations. As a result, its institutional influence on marriage timing is relatively limited compared to secular educational and social systems. Muslim youth in these contexts rely more heavily on broader societal norms shaped by individualism and delayed life transitions. While religiosity remains important for identity formation, its direct impact on marriage timing is often secondary to structural constraints.

The comparative synthesis of findings reveals that delayed marriage among Muslim youth is shaped by a consistent set of structural determinants across all three contexts. Economic insecurity, educational expansion, cultural individualization, gendered expectations, and evolving religiosity interact in complex ways to produce delayed transitions into marriage. Table 1 presents a comparative overview of these determinants across Indonesia, Spain, and Portugal, while Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual model of their interrelationships.

Table 1. Comparative Determinants of Delayed Marriage among Muslim Youth

| Dimension | Indonesia | Spain | Portugal |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|--|-------------------------------|
| Economic factors | Informal work, low income | Precarious employment, high housing cost | Similar to Spain |
| Education | Strong driver of delay | Extended education & training | Extended education & training |

| Dimension | Indonesia | Spain | Portugal |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Cultural norm | Marriage still normative | Individualized marriage | Individualized marriage |
| Religion role | Strong but negotiated | Moderate, secular context | Moderate, secular context |
| Gender pattern | Male provider norm persists | High female autonomy | High female autonomy |

Source: Authors' synthesis based on reviewed literature (SLR)

Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Delayed Marriage among Muslim Youth



Source: Author's conceptual synthesis based on SLR findings

Overall, the findings indicate that delayed marriage among Muslim youth is a structurally embedded phenomenon shaped by the interaction of economic uncertainty, educational expansion, cultural individualization, gendered expectations, and evolving religious interpretations. While contextual variations exist between Indonesia, Spain, and Portugal, the underlying structural logic of delayed transition into marriage is remarkably consistent. This suggests that delayed marriage is not merely a cultural deviation but a global social transformation affecting both Muslim-majority and minority contexts (Palumbo et al., 2024; Yeung & Abalos, 2025).

DISCUSSION

The findings synthesized in this study provide a comprehensive theoretical explanation of delayed marriage among Muslim youth in Indonesia, Spain, and Portugal. Based on a systematic review of interdisciplinary literature, delayed marriage is best understood not as an isolated demographic behavior or cultural deviation, but as a structural and relational outcome of global social transformation. These transformations involve the reconfiguration of economic



systems, expansion of educational pathways, redefinition of gender relations, and evolving interpretations of religiosity within modern life-course trajectories. Rather than treating these dimensions separately, this discussion emphasizes their mutual constitution in shaping contemporary marriage postponement. A central theoretical insight emerging from the synthesis is the increasing dominance of economic rationalization in marriage decision-making. Across the literature, economic stability consistently emerges as a prerequisite condition for marriage formation. Classical economic theories of marriage argue that individuals enter or postpone marriage based on perceived utility maximization under conditions of uncertainty (Adserà & Ferrer, 2015). However, this study extends that argument by showing that economic rationality is no longer merely an external constraint but has become internalized as a normative expectation among youth. Marriage is increasingly perceived not only as a social or religious obligation but as an economic project requiring financial preparedness, housing stability, and labor market security.

This internalization is particularly visible in both Muslim-majority and European contexts, although it manifests differently. In Indonesia, economic preparedness is often socially and morally framed as part of responsible adulthood, closely connected to religious and cultural expectations of family formation. In Spain and Portugal, similar logic emerges but is primarily driven by structural conditions such as precarious employment, delayed labor market entry, and high housing costs. This convergence suggests that global neoliberal economic restructuring has produced a shared logic of “economic preconditioned marriage,” where financial readiness becomes a universal gatekeeping mechanism for family formation regardless of cultural or religious context (Lo Bue et al., 2022; Yeung & Abalos, 2025).

Education represents the second major structuring force in delayed marriage. The literature consistently demonstrates that expanded access to higher education significantly reshapes life-course transitions by extending dependency periods and delaying entry into stable employment. However, the role of education is not limited to economic delay. It also functions as a transformative social institution that reshapes identity formation, future orientation, and individual aspirations. As Acar (2022) and Paul (2019) show, educational attainment is strongly correlated with delayed marriage, particularly among women, as it increases both opportunity costs of early marriage and aspirations for personal development. From a theoretical perspective, education functions as a “temporal restructuring mechanism” of adulthood transitions. It disrupts traditional sequencing models of life-course progression, replacing linear pathways with flexible and prolonged transitions. This is particularly evident in Spain and Portugal, where institutionalized higher education systems, combined with labor market instability, extend the period between adolescence and full adulthood. In Indonesia, education operates within a hybrid structure where academic aspirations coexist with persistent normative expectations of early marriage, producing a tension between idealized life planning and practical postponement.

Importantly, education also shapes cognitive frameworks through which marriage is evaluated. Seginer and Mahajna (2016) argue that higher education among Muslim youth expands future orientation and strengthens individual agency in life planning. This suggests that education does not merely delay marriage structurally but also redefines its meaning. Marriage becomes a contingent life choice rather than an obligatory milestone, subject to personal evaluation and readiness criteria. Within Islamic education discourse, these findings reveal a significant



tension between normative ideals and contemporary social realities. Islamic educational thought traditionally frames marriage as a moral, spiritual, and social institution that ensures ethical stability, family continuity, and communal well-being. However, the literature indicates that Islamic educational institutions, particularly in Muslim-majority contexts, often emphasize doctrinal and ritual aspects of marriage while providing limited engagement with socio-economic realities affecting youth readiness. This creates what can be conceptualized as a “normative–practical gap” in Islamic education. Youth are socialized into strong normative expectations regarding marriage, yet lack structured preparation for the economic, psychological, and relational dimensions required for contemporary marital life. As a result, religious affirmation of marriage coexists with structural postponement in practice. Rather than rejecting Islamic values, youth reinterpret them within the constraints of modern life conditions. In European contexts such as Spain and Portugal, Islamic education is largely decentralized and community-based, operating primarily through mosques and informal learning networks. This institutional configuration limits its regulatory influence on life-course decisions. Consequently, Islamic education functions more as identity preservation than behavioral structuring. Muslim youth in these contexts navigate dual normative environments: Islamic ethical frameworks and secular institutional logics. This aligns with Simsek et al. (2019), who highlight the increasing individualization of religious identity among Muslim youth in Western Europe. The present synthesis extends this argument by demonstrating that in such contexts, Islamic education influences moral orientation but has limited direct impact on marriage timing decisions.

Another important theoretical contribution of this study is the integration of individualization theory into the analysis of Muslim family formation. Across the reviewed literature, there is a clear shift from collectivist and obligation-based marriage norms toward individualized life-course planning. Marriage is increasingly understood as a personal decision rather than a social duty. This reflects broader sociological arguments about late modernity, in which traditional institutions lose their deterministic authority over life trajectories. Engelen and Puschmann (2011) describe this transformation in Western Europe as part of a long-term historical shift toward delayed marriage and increased autonomy. However, the present synthesis demonstrates that similar tendencies are emerging in Indonesia, suggesting that individualization is not culturally bounded but globally diffused. The key difference lies not in whether individualization occurs, but in how it is negotiated within existing religious and cultural frameworks. In Muslim-majority contexts, individualization coexists with normative religious expectations, producing hybrid decision-making logics.

Gender relations further mediate the impact of these structural transformations. The literature consistently indicates that women are at the forefront of delayed marriage due to expanded access to education and labor market participation. This supports Darakchi (2018), who argues that gender role transformation within Muslim communities reshapes expectations regarding family formation. However, rather than treating gender as an independent variable, this study conceptualizes it as a mediating mechanism through which education and economic restructuring influence marriage timing. Women’s increased educational attainment raises both opportunity costs of early marriage and aspirations for autonomy, while men continue to emphasize economic readiness and provider responsibility. This asymmetry reflects the persistence of traditional gender scripts within evolving structural conditions. As a result,



delayed marriage is not only a structural phenomenon but also a gendered negotiation process between changing aspirations and enduring normative expectations.

The study also highlights the role of cultural globalization and digital modernity in reshaping youth perceptions of marriage. Exposure to global media, digital platforms, and transnational cultural flows has expanded youth imaginaries of adulthood beyond traditional family-centered models. Marriage is increasingly decentered as the primary marker of adulthood and replaced by alternative life aspirations such as career development, mobility, and self-actualization. Nisha et al. (2025) emphasize that intersectional identities in globalized contexts reshape social expectations among Muslim populations. This study synthesizes this insight by arguing that digital globalization accelerates the convergence of delayed marriage patterns across diverse cultural and religious contexts. Importantly, this does not imply cultural homogenization, but rather structural convergence under shared global conditions. Comparatively, Indonesia, Spain, and Portugal represent different positions within a broader transformation continuum. Indonesia reflects a hybrid system where religious norms remain strong but are increasingly mediated by economic and educational constraints. Spain and Portugal reflect more secularized systems where individual autonomy and structural economic conditions dominate life-course transitions. Despite these differences, the convergence in delayed marriage patterns suggests the existence of a shared global structural logic underpinning contemporary youth transitions.

Theoretically, these findings contribute to the development of an integrated analytical framework that combines Islamic education theory with sociological life-course analysis. Instead of positioning religion and modernity as opposing forces, the evidence suggests a co-constitutive relationship in which religious norms are reinterpreted within structural constraints. Islamic education provides normative meaning and ethical orientation, while socio-economic structures determine practical feasibility. The interaction between these dimensions produces a negotiated form of modern Muslim subjectivity characterized by delayed but not abandoned marriage. From a policy perspective, the synthesis suggests the need for reform in Islamic educational approaches toward marriage preparation. Rather than focusing solely on normative instruction, Islamic education should incorporate practical competencies such as financial literacy, relational readiness, and adaptive life planning. Such integration would help bridge the gap between normative expectations and structural realities faced by contemporary youth.

In conclusion, delayed marriage among Muslim youth is best understood as a multidimensional and globally convergent phenomenon shaped by the interaction of economic rationalization, educational expansion, cultural individualization, gender renegotiation, and religious reinterpretation. While contextual variations remain significant, the underlying structural dynamics reveal strong similarities across Indonesia, Spain, and Portugal, reinforcing the argument that marriage postponement is a defining feature of contemporary global modernity rather than a culturally specific deviation.

CONCLUSION

This study examined delayed marriage among Muslim youth in Indonesia, Spain, and Portugal by analyzing how economic, educational, cultural, and religious factors interact within broader processes of global social transformation. The study addressed three main objectives:



identifying the key determinants of marriage postponement, comparing contextual similarities and differences across the three countries, and interpreting their implications for Islamic education. The findings indicate that delayed marriage is not an isolated demographic phenomenon, but a structural outcome of modern life-course transformation shaped by globalization, individualization, and socio-economic restructuring. Across all contexts, marriage is increasingly understood as a conditional life decision rather than an immediate social or religious obligation, reflecting a significant shift in youth transitions to adulthood and family formation patterns.

A central finding is that economic factors are the most consistent and influential driver of delayed marriage across all three contexts. Young people in Indonesia, Spain, and Portugal increasingly prioritize financial stability, secure employment, and adequate housing before entering marriage. Despite differences in religious and institutional environments, the economic logic of marriage remains highly convergent. Labor market instability, rising living costs, and employment precarity extend the transition to adulthood and delay family formation. In parallel, educational expansion further reinforces this pattern by prolonging dependency periods and reshaping youth aspirations toward career development and personal achievement before marriage. Cultural and religious factors also shape marriage timing in context-specific ways. In Indonesia, Islamic values remain a strong normative reference, but their influence is increasingly negotiated with economic and educational realities. In Spain and Portugal, secularization and individualization processes have further weakened institutional pressure, leading to marriage being framed primarily as a matter of personal autonomy. Gender dynamics intensify these trends, as women tend to delay marriage due to higher educational attainment and career aspirations, while men emphasize financial readiness as a primary condition for marriage.

From the perspective of Islamic education, these findings reveal both relevance and a critical gap. Islamic education continues to position marriage as a central moral and spiritual institution that supports ethical formation and social stability. However, there is a clear mismatch between normative teachings and the lived realities of Muslim youth, who often postpone marriage due to structural economic and educational constraints. This indicates the need to reconceptualize Islamic education toward a more applied and life-oriented framework that integrates not only doctrinal knowledge but also practical competencies such as financial literacy, emotional maturity, communication skills, and family life preparation. Such integration is essential to ensure that Islamic education remains responsive to contemporary social transformations while preserving its ethical and spiritual foundations. The study is limited by its reliance on secondary literature through a systematic review approach, the absence of primary empirical data, and the restricted comparative scope of only three countries. Future research should adopt mixed-method and longitudinal designs to capture lived experiences and temporal changes in marriage behavior, as well as expand comparative frameworks to other global regions for broader analytical depth.

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