

Legal and Social Challenges of Marriages Involving Individuals with Mental Disorders in Rural Indonesia: A Case Study

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Received: 12-11-2025

Revised: 25-12-2025

Accepted: 06-12-2025

Abstract

This study explores the legal and social issues surrounding marriages involving individuals with mental disorders in rural Indonesia, focusing on a case in Dusun Jambu Tenang, Bilah Hulu District. The problem reflects broader global concerns about marital legality, mental competence, and the protection of vulnerable individuals within family law frameworks. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research analyzes how the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) determines the validity of such marriages by examining institutional interpretations, administrative practices, and local community norms. Data were gathered through interviews with KUA officials, religious leaders, family members, field observations, and document analysis. The findings show that KUA Bilah Hulu places legal and mental capacity as core determinants of marital validity. Consistent with Indonesian Marriage Law and the Compilation of Islamic Law, the KUA maintains that a marriage is invalid when mental incapacity prevents a prospective spouse from providing conscious and voluntary consent. Therefore, medical or psychiatric assessment becomes essential whenever indications of mental disorders arise. However, the absence of detailed technical guidelines, limited mental-health services in rural settings, and strong sociocultural pressures often hinder proper verification. This case contributes to global discussions on the rights of persons with psychosocial disabilities, particularly regarding free and informed consent as emphasized in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The study highlights the need for clearer regulatory mechanisms and stronger cross-sector collaboration to ensure legal protection and prevent forced or invalid marriages.

Keywords: Case Study, KUA, Legal Capacity, Marriage Legality, Mental Disorders.



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INTRODUCTION

Marriage as a social institution is not only understood as a sacred bond from a cultural and religious perspective, but also as a legal construction that demands the fulfillment of certain conditions in order to guarantee the dignity and protection of the individual. However, when the practice of marriage involves People with Mental Disorders (ODGJ), the problem becomes much more complex. In rural areas such as Jambu Tenang Hamlet, Bilah Hulu District, Labuhan Batu, public understanding of mental health and marriage law is still very limited (Williasari et al., 2024). In this context, marriage is often positioned as a social solution to the burden of the family or as a mechanism to avoid stigma, so that the interests and rights of ODGJ individuals are often ignored. This phenomenon parallels the findings of various international studies that show that forced marriage to individuals with mental disorders often arises in societies with low health literacy and strong social structures communally (Lyngdoh et al., 2023).

Normatively, marriage law in Indonesia emphasizes that common sense is a fundamental requirement for giving legal consent for the continuation of a marriage contract. The provisions

in Law Number 1 of 1974, the revision of Law Number 16 of 2019, and the Compilation of Islamic Law affirm that consent is only valid if it is given in a conscious condition, without coercion, and with complete mental capacity. However, in practice, this provision often clashes with local social norms that view marriage as a moral solution for ODGJ families. In various global contexts, research on *mental health and marital capacity* It shows the same pattern: the state seeks to protect the rights of individuals, while local communities maintain traditional norms that justify the union of couples for the sake of social stability (Nasihah & Faizah, 2025).

It is in this situation that the role of the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) becomes very strategic. KUA is not only an administrative institution, but also an actor that deals directly with the tug-of-war between state law, religious law, and local customary pressures. Regulations require KUA to ensure that the bride-to-be is mentally qualified to marry, but the implementation of this rule at the village level often faces obstacles: lack of mental health checks, weak cross-agency coordination, and strong social authority of families and traditional leaders. The lack of technical guidance on how to verify the mental capacity of the prospective bride and groom also creates a gray space for KUA in the field (Yahuza & Masrokhin, 2025).

Until now, research on ODGJ marriage has focused more on normative aspects or on family case studies, while the analysis rarely highlights how local authorities, especially KUAs, navigate conflicts between positive law, sharia, and communal norms. This gap is what this research aims to bridge. Jambu Tenang Hamlet is a representative example to see how ODGJ marriage practices take place at the grassroots level, how families and communities understand mental capacity in marriage contracts, and how KUA Bilah Hulu responds to the legal vulnerabilities experienced by ODGJ (Sakdiyah, 2024).

Thus, this study aims to reveal the actual dynamics in marriage practices involving ODGJ, including changes in public perception, legal implementation by KUA, and challenges in ensuring the fulfillment of the rights and dignity of each prospective bride. This study is expected to broaden the understanding of the relationship between customs, religion, state law, and issues of protection of vulnerable groups in the context of rural Indonesia which is facing modernization and increasing global attention to the rights of people with mental disabilities (Limawati, 2025).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to understand in depth how the Religious Affairs Office (KUA) of Bilah Hulu interprets, interprets, and applies the provisions of marriage law related to Persons with Mental Disorders (ODGJ) in Jambu Tenang Hamlet. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore social, legal, and religious dynamics that are complex and cannot be explained through quantitative measurements. The focus of the research is directed at identifying institutional perspectives, administrative practices, as well as social and normative considerations that influence KUA decisions in handling ODGJ marriage cases (Annur & Fawzi, 2023).

Data collection is carried out through three main techniques: in-depth interviews, direct observations, and documentation, which are also the basis for triangulation to improve the reliability of the findings. The research informants amounted to 10 people, consisting of the Head of KUA Bilah Hulu, two KUA staff, two religious leaders, two ODGJ families who had faced marriage problems, and three residents of Jambu Tenang Hamlet who knew the local social conditions. The selection of informants is carried out purposively based on their direct involvement or knowledge of the phenomenon

being studied. All interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner to provide space for informants to explain their views in depth.

The ethical aspect is an important concern in this study. Each informant is given informed consent, which is conscious consent after receiving an explanation of the purpose of the research, the rights of the source, and the option to refuse or stop the interview at any time. The personal data of all informants is then anonymized to protect their identities and maintain the confidentiality of sensitive information, especially because research concerns mental health issues. Data is analyzed through three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing continuously throughout the research process. Source triangulation and re-checking of informants were used to ensure the validity of findings and the consistency of narratives obtained from various sources.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Definition of Person in Mental Disorders (ODGJ) and Its Relation in Marriage

Mental disorders or mental disorders are disorders experienced by individuals in thinking and behaving like normal humans in general. From a psychological perspective, it leads to a less normal mental state (abnormality of normality) (Zhang & Axinn, 2021). On the official website of the Ministry of Health, it is written that mental or psychiatric disorders are health conditions that affect thoughts, feelings, behaviors, moods, or a combination of them. This condition can last for a long time (chronic) (Atsauri & Firmansyah, 2023).

According to the Mental Health Law Number 40 of 2014, People with Mental Disorders (ODGJ) are individuals who experience disorders in thoughts, behaviors, and feelings, which manifest in the form of a collection of symptoms or significant behavioral changes, and can cause suffering and obstacles in carrying out human functions (Holis et al., 2024). The relation of ODGJ in marriage is contained in Article 14 of Law Number 1 of 1974 which reads "Marriage can be annulled, if the parties do not meet the conditions to carry out the marriage". The article also mentions anyone who can apply for annulment, namely blood relatives in the straight and upward lineage of the husband or wife, the husband or wife himself, and the authorized officials as long as the marriage has not been decided, as well as parties with legal interests immediately after the marriage has broken down (Marriage Act No. 1 of 1974, 1974).

ODGJ Marriage Case in Jambu Tenang Hamlet, Labuhan Batu Regency

KUA generally understands that marriage for Persons with Mental Disorders (ODGJ) is a very sensitive issue and is strictly regulated by both state regulations and Islamic law. This understanding is based on the principle that one of the conditions for the validity of marriage is the legal competency of both brides-to-be, which includes common sense and the ability to give consent consciously and freely (Firstanza et al., 2025). In this context, Law Number 1 of 1974 concerning Marriage and the Compilation of Islamic Law (KHI) emphasizes that the harmony and legal conditions of marriage cannot be fulfilled if one of the parties is in a condition of severe mental disorder that hinders the ability to understand and agree on marriage (Pradikta et al., 2025).

Bandar Tinggi Village In Jambu Tenang Hamlet, Bilah Hulu District, Labuhanbatu Regency, lives a young woman who is known to residents with different behaviors since childhood. Since birth, he has shown signs of a psychiatric disorder. He grew up in a simple and loving family environment, but his mental condition did not improve over time. He is not a quiet person, quite the opposite. He often shows violent and emotional reactions to certain

things. One of the main triggers is when he sees people who are dating or alone. Every time she sees a partner who looks intimate, or even just sees a man who she thinks is handsome, her mental state is immediately disturbed. He can suddenly get angry, shout, or even throw objects at the person. This reaction occurs spontaneously and cannot be controlled.

Despite her condition, a few years ago, precisely in July 2024, her family decided to marry her to a man from another village not far from where she lived. This marriage is carried out customarily and recorded at the KUA. The hope of his parents and family at that time was that marriage could be a solution to make him calmer and someone to take care of. However, their home life did not go well. As time went by, he continued to show the same behavior. She is often hot-tempered, easily inflamed by emotions, and feels uncomfortable with the presence of people around her husband. Conflicts began to arise, until finally an incident occurred where he threw objects at his mother-in-law because she felt disturbed. After the incident, their domestic relationship became increasingly tense.

Eventually, her husband chose to separate and leave his wife. Now they no longer live together, but legally they are still legally bound by marriage, because there has been no official divorce in the religious court. He is currently living with his family. Local residents know the condition and some understand, although not a few still have a stigma. This case is a stark illustration of the complexity of marriage for people with mental disorders in villages, where community understanding, support for religious institutions, and access to mental health services are still very limited.³³

Social Practices in Jambu Tenang Hamlet: Between Legal Norms and Local Culture

Field observations and interviews with community leaders and ODGJ families in Jambu Tenang Hamlet show that the village community still has a traditional view of marriage, namely as a form of complement to life or the transfer of the burden of family dependents (Fadah et al., 2025). In some cases, there are attempts to marry ODGJ to avoid social disgrace or to eliminate the "burden of the family". The public does not fully understand that marriages involving ODGJ without legal skills are not only illegal, but also risk violating human rights. In fact, some residents stated that as long as there is a guardian, the marriage is considered valid, without considering the mental state of the prospective bride. This shows that there is a gap in understanding between legal norms and social practices. In this case, the position of KUA becomes very dilemmatic. On the one hand, they have to enforce the law and refuse to record; on the other hand, they have to face social and emotional pressure from people who consider KUA as a barrier to family goodwill. This condition shows that the implementation of marriage law for ODGJ still faces cultural obstacles, especially in rural areas such as Jambu Tenang Hamlet (Arrasyid et al., 2024)

Table 1. Marriage Law Sector

Sector	Key Requirements	Practice in the Field
National Law	Legally savvy, aware of the contract, health certificate	Marriage rejected if conditions are not met
Islamic Law	Conscious, able to understand the contract, can accept the	Marriage is legal if the ijab of Kabul is fulfilled

	consequences of the husband-wife relationship	
Local Culture	Family deliberations, social protection, human values	Family social support is usually abundant
KUA Administration	Mental health screenings, family consent, witness and guardian attendance	A health letter and family approval are required

KUA's Upstream Views on ODGJ Weddings in Jambu Tenang Hamlet

In this study, the author found that the Bilah Hulu Religious Affairs Office (KUA) has quite firm views and reasons for the implementation of marriage for People with Mental Disorders (ODGJ). Based on the results of an interview conducted with Mr. H. Tukino, M, Sos. As the Head of the Religious Affairs Office (KUA) of Bilah Hulu District, it is known that ODGJ marriages are considered to have many obstacles, both from legal, religious, and family benefits in the future.

Table 2. Interview Results

No.	Question	Answer / Explanation of KUA Upper Blade
1	What is the reason for KUA Bilah Hulu to hold an ODGJ wedding in Jambu Tenang Hamlet?	KUA does not have the authority to refuse marriage if all administrative requirements have been met in accordance with SOPs and regulations. There is no court ruling or medical recommendation that states the bride-to-be is unfit for marriage. KUA also said that there was no honesty from the family.
2	At that time, did the KUA receive medical evidence or a mental health certificate from the bride-to-be?	Not. There is no certificate from a psychiatrist or psychologist stating that the bride-to-be has a severe mental disorder or is unable to undergo marriage.
3	Is there pressure from the family or other parties to keep the marriage going?	No pressure/coercion. The marriage guardian (biological father/legal guardian) gives permission and expresses his willingness to marry. In Islamic law, the consent of the guardian is a valid condition for marriage, so the KUA cannot cancel the process.
4	What are the lessons or evaluation of the KUA from this incident for similar cases in the future?	The KUA suggested the need for a new regulation that requires mental health checks for the bride-to-be if there is an indication of ODGJ. In addition, KUA will be stricter in verifying data and ensuring the existence of a mental health certificate if indications of psychological disorders are found.

KUA views that as long as all the requirements of marriage administration have been fulfilled in accordance with the applicable legal provisions, the KUA does not have a legal basis to reject a marriage application, including in the case of a bride-to-be who is suspected of having a mental disorder. In the case of the ODGJ marriage in Jambu Tenang Hamlet, the KUA stated that there was no medical certificate showing a severe mental disorder, and the marriage guardian also gave legal consent. Even so, KUA realizes that the lack of openness from the family and the absence of psychiatric examinations are weaknesses in the process. Therefore, KUA considers the need for additional regulations that require mental health examinations for brides-to-be who are indicated to have mental disorders, to ensure that the marriage takes place with adequate physical, mental, and legal readiness.

In carrying out its duties, KUA Bilah Hulu faces several main obstacles. First, there is a lack of public education about mental health and marriage law, which makes people often force their will without considering legal aspects. Second, limited access to mental health services at the sub-district level, which makes it difficult to check the condition of ODGJ before marriage. Third, the lack of operational technical regulations that provide detailed guidelines to KUA in dealing with marriage cases that intersect with mental problems.

Table 3. Regulatory Aspects

Yes	Regulatory Aspects	Tree Contents	Relevance to ODGJ
1	Law No. 1/1974	Article 6: Consent of both parties	Invalid if you are not aware of the law
2	KHI	Articles 14 and 16	Regulating the requirements of intellectual competence

In addition, KUA officers also complained that the refusal to register marriages often caused interpersonal conflicts with the community. There is an assumption that KUA is too bureaucratic or does not understand the social situation of the community. For this reason, KUA Bilah Hulu proposes cross-sectoral collaboration, including the Health Office, Social Service, and local religious leaders, to provide a collective understanding and prevent the practice of marriage involving ODGJ illegally. The handling of marriages of Persons with Mental Disorders (ODGJ) poses multidimensional challenges for the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA), especially in rural areas such as Jambu Tenang Hamlet. These barriers include procedural, socio-cultural, legal understanding, technical limitations, and regulations that are still not fully adaptive. Here is the full description:

1. Verification of the Proficiency of the Prospective Bride KUA officers often face difficulties in ascertaining whether the prospective bride and groom are really aware and legally capable during the contract. Especially in cases of mental disorders that are not physically visible, temporary, or have not been officially diagnosed, the assessment process becomes highly subjective. Legal proficiency is often only proven through a medical certificate, but not all of them are prepared on a thorough psychiatric or psychological examination (Pradikta et al., 2025). In rural areas such as Jambu Tenang Hamlet, limited health facilities and access to experts increase the risk of inaccurate mental diagnosis.

2. **Local Social and Cultural Urgency** There are times when ODGJ families actually insist on marriage for social reasons such as avoiding disgrace, reducing the burden of care, or meeting community expectations. This support and even insistence makes KUA hesitate or do not dare to refuse to register marriages even though the legal requirements have not been met. For the local community, ODGJ weddings can be seen as a social solution. This makes cultural considerations more dominant than positive legal considerations (Masithah, 2022). KUA, on the other hand, is caught between its duties as state implementers and as part of a society that upholds local harmony (Dalimunthe et al., 2023).
3. **Lack of Legal Understanding by Rural Communities** often do not fully understand the importance of the principle of legal proficiency and awareness in marriage contracts, as stipulated in the Marriage Law and the Compilation of Islamic Law (Ambarsari et al., 2024). Many still consider that the origin of *ijab kabul* is fulfilled customarily or religiously, then marriage is legal. Due to the lack of legal understanding, the community relies more on local norms and social practices that are inherited from generation to generation. This causes the official procedures of the KUA to be considered less important or negotiable (Rizal & Fuad, 2023).
4. **Limited Human Resources and Technical Facilities** The absence of psychologists and psychiatrists in rural areas makes the screening process for prospective ODGJ brides inaccurate and unprofessional. Assessments are often based only on brief observations or family testimonials (Haris & Alam, 2023). KUA officers themselves rarely receive special training on the detection of psychiatric disorders and their implications in marriage law. As a result, many decisions are made based on personal intuition or social pressure, rather than on robust legal procedures.
5. **Ambiguity of Marriage Law Regulation:** Both the Marriage Law and the Compilation of Islamic Law refer to the terms "legally capable", but do not specify the type of mental disorder, whether temporary, chronic, or medically controllable. This causes a wide interpretation space in the hands of the head of KUA. When ODGJ marries in a conscious state, but then experiences a relapse or mental relapse after marriage, the legal functions of marriage such as the protection of wives/husbands and children become weak. The decision to register by the KUA in this situation can cause legal conflicts in the future, including a lawsuit for annulment of marriage (Firstanza et al., 2025).

The Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) serves as the implementer of state regulations in marriage registration. This means that every marriage can only be recorded if it has met all legal and administrative requirements. However, in the context of the marriage of People with Mental Disorders (ODGJ), KUA faces serious obstacles in verifying the skills of the bride-to-be.

1. **Limited facilities for mental health examinations, access to medical professionals, and valid psychological measuring tools** are challenges. This condition creates ambiguity in assessing the legal proficiency of ODGJ, especially if the disturbance experienced is not physically or temporarily visible. The health certificate that is a prerequisite for administration does not necessarily reflect the actual mental condition of the prospective bride and groom on the day of the contract (Nurmala et al., 2024).
2. **Social and Cultural Barriers** The Jambu Tenang Hamlet community, like other villages in the Sumatra region, has a strong social culture in prioritizing harmony and family problem

solving. In this context, ODGJ marriage is sometimes considered a social solution to avoid family disgrace, reduce the burden of care, or meet customary norms. This condition puts KUA in a dilemmatic position. On the one hand, they have to enforce formal laws and prevent illegal marriages. On the other hand, if it is too firm or rejects marriage, the KUA risks getting social resistance from the community, even triggering the practice of marriage under the hand (nikah siri) that is not legally recorded (Rahadianti & Muslim, 2023).

3. **Regulatory Barriers and Limited Resources:** Normatively, the Marriage Law and the regulations of the Ministry of Religion affirm that legal competence is a valid requirement for marriage (Matussilmi et al., 2025). However, the reality on the ground shows that the categories of mental disorders are very diverse, ranging from mild, temporary, to chronic disorders. The case of ODGJ who is able to be conscious during the contract but relapses after marriage raises new problems.

When ODGJ experiences post-marriage relapse, family functions cannot be carried out optimally. This weakens legal protections for spouses and children, and creates new legal conflicts in the future (Febriansyah, 2022). The absence of detailed guidelines and limited resources, especially psychologists/psychiatrists and special training for officers, make decision-making at KUA tend to be subjective and full of risks.

Table 4. Types of Barriers

Types of Barriers	Explanation	Impact on the Field
Medical Verification	Lack of legal competency examination of ODGJ	Risk of invalid or cancellable contracts
Cultural Pressure	Family or community pressure on KUA decisions	KUA "allows" non-ideal marriages
Community Understanding	Lack of knowledge about the laws and requirements of marriage	The increasing practice of marriage under the hand
Human Resources and Facilities	Limitations of trained personnel and professional psychologists	Legal competency assessment is subjective/formal.
Regulatory Ambiguity	The rules on ODGJ are not yet specific to cases in the field	Uncertainty and doubts of KUA in making decisions

CONCLUSION

This study shows that marriages involving Persons with Mental Disorders (ODGJ) still face three basic problems: (1) weak medical verification regarding the psychological condition of the prospective bride, (2) regulatory gaps and the lack of strict operational standards for KUA in handling similar cases, and (3) strong social pressure and low legal literacy at the village level which makes marriage an instant solution to family problems. These three issues have direct implications for the validity of contracts, the protection of ODGJ rights, and legal certainty in marriage practices at the grassroots level.

These findings confirm the existence of an adequate regulatory vacuum in national law, particularly regarding mandatory medical examination procedures for prospective brides with

indications of psychiatric disorders. Therefore, this research contributes scientifically by highlighting the need for integration between the perspectives of family law, mental health, and human rights protection, an issue that is relevant not only in Indonesia, but also in the global discourse on *legal capacity* and *supported decision-making* for people with mental disabilities.

As a recommendation, this study encourages the need for cross-sectoral intervention through the preparation of technical SOPs, capacity building of KUA officers, the obligation of mental health certificates from medical professionals, and legal education for the community. At a broader policy level, these findings can serve as a basis for strengthening national regulations that are in line with international standards such as *the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD), as well as opening up space for further research that examines legal protection models and informed *consent mechanisms* for ODGJ in the context of marriage.

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