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Evaluation of Premarital Counseling Programs at the Office of Religious Affairs in Surakarta

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Abstract

This study aims to evaluate the implementation of the premarital counseling program at the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) in Surakarta, particularly through the "Make Me Halalmu" program, in preparing prospective brides and grooms for marriage. This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and documentation. The research subjects consisted of religious instructors and officials at the KUA Jebres, Surakarta. Data were analyzed using descriptive qualitative techniques. he results show that the implementation of premarital counseling has followed structured stages, including preparation, implementation, and evaluation. The program contributes to improving participants' understanding and mental readiness for marriage. However, several challenges were identified, such as limited funding, low participant commitment, and constraints in program capacity. The "Make Me Halalmu" program also demonstrates innovation in attracting public interest, although its effectiveness in achieving long-term outcomes remains limited. It is recommended that the KUA strengthen program management, expand participant capacity, and develop more comprehensive and sustainable evaluation mechanisms. Future research is also encouraged to apply more specific evaluation models to assess the effectiveness of premarital counseling programs.

Keywords: evaluation, premarital counselling, KUA, program innovation, marriage readiness

Introduction

Premarital counseling is mandatory for prospective husbands and wives planning to marry. This is in accordance with the provisions of the Director General

of Islamic Community Guidance Regulation No. DJ.II/491 of 2009, as updated by the Director General of Islamic Community Guidance Regulation No. DJ.II/542 of 2013 (Jumas, 2021). The Marriage Advisory, Guidance, and Preservation Agency (BP4) at the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) is the institution responsible for this matter.

Starting in September 2021, the Solo City Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) has launched a breakthrough in bridging the gap between individuals planning to marry. The "Make Me Halalmu" program has successfully attracted public interest. This is evident in the number of registrants, which reached 540 (Wahyuana, 2022). This is a significant number for a new service program.

This innovative program wasn't born out of necessity. It was carefully planned. As stated by the head of the Jebres Solo Office of Religious Affairs (KUA), Arba'in Basyar, individuals who register for the "Make Me Halalmu" program will receive intensive guidance, from pre-, implementation, and post-taaruf (Zamani, 2021).

Following the success of the program launched last year, the Solo City Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) is reopening its second "Make Me Halalmu" program in 2022. High public interest is the reason why this program continues. From the first edition, 380 serious applicants out of a total of 540 people registered. Of these, seven couples ultimately reached the wedding altar (Wahyuana, 2022).

Learning from the "Make Me Halalmu" program, it can be said that premarital counseling has evolved to be more modern and adaptable to the times. It has broken away from standard conventions. Individuals planning to marry are indirectly selected. Subconsciously, these prospective couples are easier to guide and advise. After all, premarital counseling can be a bulwark against marriage (Angraini, Nelisma, Silvianetri, & Fajri, 2022; Zahri, Neviyarni, Marjohan, & Afdal, 2022).

The Ministry of Religious Affairs, through the BP4 (Religious Affairs Advisory Board), believes that premarital preparation is just as important as post-marital issues. Both brides and grooms are equipped with various preparations to ensure their marriage is problem-free. Research by Kurniawati, Rahmah, and Zainah (2021) shows that premarital counseling is essential for adolescents planning to marry. However, it's not as easy as flipping a switch; it's fraught with challenges and trials, such as divorce.

Aco Nur, Director General of the Supreme Court's Judicial Body (Dirjen Badilag MARI), stated that the divorce rate during April and May 2020 was below 20,000 cases. However, in July, the figure surged to 57,000 cases. Economic issues were the number one cause of divorce (detikNews, 2021).

In 2020, the divorce rate in Solo reached 206 cases. The majority of cases were caused by persistent arguments or disagreements, accounting for 154 cases. There were also 18 cases of divorce due to infidelity. Other issues included domestic violence (KDRT), polygamy, drunkenness, and partner imprisonment (Meidinata, 2021).

The high divorce rate during the pandemic has become a challenge for the BP4 (National Agency for Marriage and Family Welfare), a non-compliance program. Inadequate preparation for prospective brides and grooms can have fatal consequences. The role of premarital counseling as a prerequisite for marriage needs to be reaffirmed. According to Wicaksono (2020), the effectiveness of premarital counseling can be seen in the number of registered participants. He further explained that public interest in participating in premarital counseling has significantly decreased.

The public appears apathetic about participating in premarital counseling. Premarital counseling is seen as a supplementary program to the BP4. Technical guidelines and other guidelines are merely cosmetic. The lack of clarity from relevant parties further fuels this apathy. This is reinforced by research by Na'mah (2016), which found that premarital counseling, or the Suscatin program, merely waives the marriage requirement for the couple. It is not an obligation.

In contrast to the aforementioned research, Azhari (2020) explained that prospective brides and grooms who participated in premarital counseling were 68% more likely to be ready for marriage. This means that the majority of those who enrolled in premarital counseling programs understood the importance of preparation before marriage. Jazil's (2020) research also indicated that prospective brides and grooms experienced greater self-confidence when participating in marriage counseling conducted at the local Office of Religious Affairs (KUA).

Wahyuningsi (2020) shared a similar opinion. In the two villages where her research took place, the premarital program was effective in fostering harmonious, loving, and compassionate families. Wadi (2020) also emphasized the crucial role of religion in shaping the personalities of prospective brides and grooms. Premarital counseling with an Islamic approach needs to be further promoted at the practical level.

Mariamah (2020) stated that the psychological maturity of prospective brides and grooms requires intensive guidance before they marry. In her research in Batulayar sub-district, the methods provided to prospective brides and grooms

included individual and group counseling, including an understanding of domestic violence (Fityani, 2020).

Research evaluating premarital counseling has also been conducted. For example, research by Rizal (2020) found that the premarital counseling program only lasted one day for prospective brides and grooms. The material presented was only a sheet of prayers for the husband and wife's marriage. The difference with this research lies in the evaluation theory used in the field.

Furthermore, research by Juniingsih and Khairunnisa (2021) showed that premarital counseling in Kendari City was running as expected. The evaluation used was not specific. Putri's (2019) research indicated that the types of evaluations conducted included process, outcomes, goal orientation, and CIPP. The method used was a literature review.

Based on the data presented above, no research has specifically addressed the evaluation of premarital counseling during the pandemic. Therefore, this study differs significantly from previous studies. The different implementation times and the phenomena occurring at the research location are compelling reasons for further study.

Although previous studies have examined premarital counseling in various contexts, most of them focus on its effectiveness in increasing marital readiness or reducing divorce rates. However, limited studies have specifically explored the evaluation of premarital counseling programs using a comprehensive perspective that includes both process and outcome aspects, particularly within religious institutional settings such as the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA).

In addition, existing research tends to emphasize conventional premarital counseling programs, while innovative approaches, such as the “Make Me Halalmu” program initiated by the Surakarta KUA, have not been widely studied. This program represents a new model that integrates premarital guidance with partner introduction mechanisms, making it গুরুত্বপূর্ণ to be examined further from an evaluative standpoint.

Therefore, there is a need for a study that not only describes the implementation of premarital counseling but also evaluates its process, effectiveness, and challenges in a specific and contextual setting.

This study is directed to examine how the premarital counseling program is implemented at the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) in Surakarta, particularly through the “Make Me Halalmu” program. Furthermore, this study seeks to evaluate

the program in terms of both its process and outcomes in preparing prospective brides and grooms for marriage. In addition, this research also explores the challenges and limitations encountered during the implementation of the program, including issues related to participant engagement, resource constraints, and program effectiveness. This study aims to evaluate the implementation of the premarital counseling program at the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) in Surakarta, including analyzing its process, outcomes, and the challenges faced in its implementation.

Method

This research is qualitative with a case study approach (Creswell, 2015). Qualitative research aims to describe and analyze phenomena, events, social activities, attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and thoughts of individuals and groups.

In case study research, researchers will examine a specific individual or social unit in depth. This way, researchers strive to identify all important variables related to the subject under study. The large amount of information to be explored in case study research requires a considerable timeframe (Moleong, 2017).

The subjects of this study were selected using purposive sampling. The criteria were those directly and indirectly involved in providing premarital counseling. They were Sugiyat, S.Ag, S.Pd.I, M.Si, and Supratman, S.Ag, as the First Expert Religious Affairs Officer (Penghulu) at the Jebres Religious Affairs Office (KUA), Widyaningsih, S.Kep, as the religous officer specializing in health, and Drs. H. Mahmud, Head of the Jebres Religious Affairs Office (KUA) in Surakarta City.

Data collection techniques are the most important step in research, as the primary goal of research is to obtain data. Without understanding data collection techniques, researchers will not obtain data that meets established data standards (Moleong, 2014). In this study, researchers conducted semi-structured interviews. The researcher must prepare writing materials and a voice recorder when conducting interviews so that the researcher can remember what the interviewer and interviewee said. A breakdown in rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee can result in a failed interview, resulting in the inability to obtain the desired data. Observation can also be referred to as observation. In this case, the researcher conducted non-participant observation regarding the implementation of premarital counseling, the evaluation of premarital counseling, and so on. Documentation is a method of data collection that involves collecting printed data. In this case, this can include photographs, notes, books, or other important documents that support the research data.

Data analysis in this study was conducted using an interactive model, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, the researcher selected, focused, and simplified the raw data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation. Relevant data related to the implementation and evaluation of premarital counseling were identified and categorized. In the data display stage, the researcher organized the data in a systematic and structured manner to facilitate understanding, using narrative descriptions. This process allowed the researcher to identify patterns, relationships, and emerging themes related to the effectiveness and challenges of the premarital counseling program. Finally, in the conclusion drawing stage, the researcher interpreted the findings by linking the empirical data with relevant theoretical perspectives. Conclusions were continuously verified throughout the research process to ensure their consistency and accuracy.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, this study applied several validation techniques. First, source triangulation was used by comparing data obtained from different informants, including religious instructors and KUA officials. Second, technique triangulation was conducted by comparing data from interviews, observations, and documentation. In addition, member checking was carried out by confirming the findings with the informants to ensure that the data accurately reflected their perspectives and experiences. The researcher also applied prolonged engagement and persistent observation to gain a deeper understanding of the research context and to enhance the credibility of the findings. Furthermore, to maintain dependability and confirmability, the researcher documented the research process systematically, including data collection procedures and analysis steps, so that the study can be audited and traced.

Result

In this section, the research results obtained from data collection and data processing with subjects and various parties related to the implementation and evaluation of premarital counseling in Surakarta will be presented.

Implementation of Premarital Counseling in Surakarta

Marriage guidance (binwin) is held four times each year, each batch consisting of 15 couples, or 30 people. The guidance is face-to-face, classical, and provides advice on marriage, lasting from eight in the morning to two-thirty over two days. This is consistent with a statement from an informant with the initials SI:

> *"Kalau klasikal itu waktunya jam 8 sampai jam setengah 3 selama 2 hari, namun ada makan siangnya dan juga istirahat untuk sholat. Kalau online 1 jam lebih tergantung*

banyak pertanyaan atau tidak. Bedanya kalau online itu hanya satu narasumber biasanya. Tapi kalau klasikal kan narasumbernya dari PLKB, Dokter puskesmas, kemudian dari fasilitator." (SI: WI, 69-78)

After that, they continued to the PLKB, which included several stages of premarital counseling in Surakarta. According to statements from informants with the initials SI and SP:

"Pertama ya kenalan biasanya, kemudian kontrak kuliah, kemudian pembentukan keluarga sakinah, kemudian pemenuhan kebutuhan keluarga, psikologi keluarga, dan dinamika, kebutuhan keluarga, pengelolaan keuangan. Kemudian ada kesehatan reproduksi, pembentukan generasi berkualitas, refleksi dan saran untuk pelaksanaannya. Kemudian baru Pre- Test dan Post-Test." (SI: WI, 82-92)

"Kita memberikan konselingnya sesuai yang ada di SOP dari Kemenag, Mbak. Jadi terstruktur. Dan penghulunya juga bergantian dalam memberikan bimbingan dan konseling". (SP: W2, 34-38).

The implementation of premarital guidance in Surakarta consists of several stages, which will be explained in more detail below.

Conducting Introductions and Contracts. This material will serve as the opening for the entire training series. Generally, it's intended to create a friendly atmosphere, making them more open and willing to obtain or explore information.

Establishment of the Sakinah Family. This material is used to invite participants to understand the status inherent in every human being as a servant of Allah SWT and the mandate as caliph on earth, including in marriage and family life. This material is very important because it is a guide for husband and wife in dealing with problems that arise in their family.

Fulfillment of Family Needs. This material is used to invite participants to identify and understand the types of needs in building a family that is peaceful, loving and compassionate, so that it requires a strategy to carry out flexible role division in the family.

Dynamics of Marriage and Family. The success and failure of marriages can be summarized, allowing us to deduce the challenges of future family life. After marriage, the dynamics a couple faces are certainly different from those they experienced before marriage.

Maintaining Reproductive Health. This material addresses reproductive health, which is one of the pillars of a harmonious family and determines its happiness and future. If reproductive health is compromised, family life will experience various challenges.

Formation of a Quality Generation. This material invites participants to explore their thoughts and hopes about the children in their families and align them with the concepts and principles of Islamic child development so as to form a quality generation.

Reflection and Evaluation. In this final session, participants were invited to reflect on the impact of the marriage counseling process on their mental readiness for marriage. Furthermore, they were encouraged to evaluate the counseling process, both substantively and technically, to serve as a basis for improving future marriage counseling services.

The aim of this session is for participants to be able to assess their level of mental readiness, as well as their readiness with their prospective husband or wife as a couple to marry and build a harmonious family, participants are able to formulate new things and things that need to be improved in the guidance process, both in substance and technically.

Evaluation of Premarital Counseling in Surakarta

Evaluation is a program designed to assist management, staff training, program planning, and improvement, in order to obtain the best possible understanding of a program's effectiveness and efficiency, measured systematically and through the correct stages. As demonstrated by the Surakarta City Office of Religious Affairs (KUA), several evaluations are used as input for future improvements in the implementation of the premarital guidance program. This is in accordance with the statements made by informants SP and SI, namely:

> *"Sistemnya begini, daftarnya lewat online, kemudian kan ada nomer telponnya. Lah kita sampaikan tanggal sekian ada bimbingan perkawinan secara online." (SP:W1,55-60)*

> *"Intinya semuanya bertolak dari satu tujuan yaitu bimbingan pranikah. Artinya kepada siapa? kepada calon manten atau kepada calon usia nikah. Kemudian kita bikin suatu kegiatan atau semacam gerakan bimbingan pranikah dengan menjaring calon usia nikah. Selain itu juga untuk yang belum punya pasangan. Barangkali melalui bimbingan ini nek Gusti Allah ngersakne bakal entuk jodoh." (SI:W1,98-108).*

Based on the interview results above, the premarital guidance program at the Surakarta City Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) is implemented online. The purpose of this premarital guidance program is to help individuals find a partner through a program created by the Surakarta City Office of Religious Affairs (KUA). The implementation of the premarital guidance program does not always run smoothly. Several obstacles hinder its implementation. The success rate of the "Make Me Halalmu" application is only a few percent. This is in accordance with the statement made by the informant:

> *"Masih sedikit sih, artinya kita koordinasikan terlebih dahulu. Misalnya setiap 500 peserta sekitar 200 cewek dan 300 cowok, nanti setiap pendamping saya, ada sekitar 20 an. Nanti kita kondisikan bimbingan perkawinan dengan melakukan google meet dan kita bikin grub yang membicarakan tentang program samawa. Kemudian dari sisi situ, barangkali ada keinginan untuk mengenal lebih dalam, nanti kita beri tahu, tapi hanya sekedar pengenalan nggeh, kalau mau ditindak lanjuti berarti nanti bisa dibicarakan berikutnya, seperti dibuatkan zoom atau video call yang berisi saya, njenengan, dan cowoknya, nah kita ngobrol-ngobrol ringan, santai, dan memberikan motivasi jangan terlalu banyak tuntutan, neko-neko karena rata-rata kan udah berumur. Setelah itu kita beri kebebasan untuk tukar nomor, dan misale mengko ndelalah kok gathuk, kok seneng mungkin bisa dilanjut." (SI:W1,112-137).*

Although the Surakarta City Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) has developed a robust service program, it is highly likely that the program will not meet initial expectations when implemented. At some point, members need to assess the various obstacles encountered in the planned program and ultimately re-plan to refine the service program. In the online implementation of the "Make Me Halalmu" application, challenges arose. According to informant SI, the following statement was made:

> *"Memang kebanyakan ngga ikut dengan berbagai alasan. Ada yang ikut ada yang tidak ikut. Kemudian kita share lagi undangan untuk mengikuti bimbingan offline dan akhirnya semua ikut. Artinya setiap pendampingan ada 5 orang, ada 7 orang melalui dokter Andre, dokter Mispar, psikologi, sama temen-teman fasilitator. Di sela-sela itu diperkenankan untuk memperkenalkan diri. Engko nek sekirane kok oke biasanya mereka mencari tempat sendiri untuk berkenalan ben ra diincer liane. Di lain waktu misalnya saya pengen kenal mbak siska, bimbingane sopo? Misal bimbingan saya, ya saya sampaikan ke Siska gini, "Mbak Siska ini ada yang mau kenalan namanya mas ini.." (SI:W1,156-173).*

The "Make Me Your Halal" program was originally implemented online to make it easier for prospective brides and grooms to access and participate. However, due to several obstacles, the "Make Me Your Halal" program, which was implemented online, has been temporarily closed. This obstacle occurred due to an excess quota, which caused the program to run less than optimally. To address this issue, the Surakarta City Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) limited the quota. As explained by informants SI and M:

> *"Tidak pakai aplikasi tapi pakai web, tapi sementara ditutup belum dibukak lagi, karena sudah 2 periode." (SI:W1,177-179).*

> *"Kalau kemarin 500 karena kebanyakan jadi kurang maksimal dalam melakukan bimbingan. Mungkin besok kita hanya buka 300 mungkin supaya lebih intens. Kalau kebanyakan kita kewalahan." (M:W1,180-185).*

Aside from the challenges of online delivery, several other aspects of the "Make Me Halalmu" premarital counseling program were evaluated. The Surakarta City Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) was unable to accommodate all prospective brides and grooms, and only a portion of them were accommodated by the KUA

because it was simply not possible to accommodate all of them. Furthermore, the budget for the premarital counseling program conducted by the KUA was adjusted based on directives from the Ministry of Religious Affairs at the city level. As stated by informant M, he said:

> *"Gitu ya mbak, jadi kalo bimbingan perkawninan itu konfinatornya tingkat kotannya ya umat islam ya UII tadi, kemudian setiap KUA ada koodinatornya sendiri. Itu yang dilaksanakan bersama-sama. Dan tutornya selain dari kementerian agama, kami juga melibatkan dari kesehatan sebagai tutornya itu yang dilaksanakan secara bersama sama sesuai arahan dari kementerian agama yang disesuaikan dengan anggaran. Seperti ada snacknya, makannya, ada sewa hotel dan sebagainnya. Jadi kita sesuai arahan dari kementerian agama yang ditingkat kota. Arahannya seperti itu jadi dilakukan setiap empat angkatan dan setiap angakatan dilakukan selama dua kali. Itu yang dilaksanakan secara bersama-sama. Kami belum bisa mengakomodir semua calon pengantin hanya sebagian dari calon pengantin. Karena tidak memungkinkan. Kami satu tahun ada sekitar 600 an calon pengantin sementara itu yang bisa diakomodasi dengan setiap angkatan hanya 15% sekitar 60 calon penganten. Itu yang dilakukan secara bersama-sama". (M:W1,43-60).*

The "Make Me Your Halal" program is a creative initiative of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, as it is not a government program and is indeed merely a form of creativity. Therefore, not every ministry of religious affairs in every city or district is implementing this program, as it is not a government program.

Implementing this program is not easy, and the success rate is still very low, as it is still new. However, the program is still running, and its committee structure is in place. The committee was formed to ensure the program runs smoothly. According to statements made by informants SI and SP:

> *"Iya semacam kreativitas dari kementerian agama kota Surakarta yang kemudian diadakan dan ternyata memang tidak mudah, makannya kemarin ada berapa persen memang kemudian menikah presentasinnya masih kecil sekali, karena masih baru atau memang ya tidak mudah gitu. " . (SI:W1,103-108).*

> *"Iya masih jalan mbak semacam ada panitiannya "Jadikan Aku Halalmu" (SP:W1,100-101).*

Discussion

In this study, counselors/religious leaders provided premarital counseling to improve mental readiness for marriage. The goal of this change was for clients to gain knowledge about marriage, make informed choices about their future, and learn how to resolve marital conflict.

The implementation and evaluation of premarital counseling at the Jebres Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) complied with Ministry of Religious Affairs procedures. Prospective brides and grooms were required to attend premarital counseling conducted by the Jebres Office of Religious Affairs (KUA). The same

applies to prospective brides and grooms who participated online through the "Make Me Halalmu" program, which was delivered via Google Meet or Zoom.

The findings indicate that the premarital counseling program at the KUA in Surakarta has been implemented in a structured manner, following stages such as introduction, material delivery, and evaluation. This structured implementation reflects procedural compliance with the guidelines established by the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

However, from an evaluative perspective, the implementation still tends to emphasize administrative completion rather than the depth of participant engagement. Although the stages are fulfilled, the effectiveness of each stage in transforming participants' readiness for marriage is not yet fully measurable. This suggests that program implementation has reached the level of procedural effectiveness but has not fully achieved substantive effectiveness.

The evaluation is also direct. After clients receive premarital counseling material, they are required to write an evaluation of the previous process. This is very helpful for the Religious Affairs Office (KUA) in evaluating their programs. Failure to follow up on evaluations will impact future programs (Rizal, 2020).

The material provided focuses on matters related to marriage, including thorough preparation. To achieve a harmonious, loving, and compassionate household, one must first prepare, including knowledge of marriage to prepare for the various challenges that may arise in the future.

Therefore, in this study, counselors used premarital counseling to improve mental readiness for marriage, so that clients have the necessary tools before marriage. This knowledge can be applied in their future marriages, leading to the creation of their dream family: a harmonious, loving, and compassionate family (Damayanti & Fitriyani, 2020; Ghozali, 2012).

From the process evaluation perspective, the program demonstrates strengths in its systematic delivery and the involvement of multidisciplinary facilitators, including religious officers and health professionals. This indicates that the program has adopted a holistic approach in addressing marital preparation.

In terms of outcome evaluation, the program contributes to increasing participants' knowledge and awareness of marital life. However, the findings also show that the success indicators are still limited to short-term outcomes, such as participation rates and immediate feedback. Long-term outcomes, such as marital stability and conflict management skills, have not been systematically evaluated.

This condition highlights the need for a more comprehensive evaluation framework that includes both short-term and long-term indicators of program success.

Premarital counseling and education, especially psychology-based ones, are underdeveloped in Indonesia. It is highly unusual for a marriage registrar to only provide marriage counseling for seven minutes before the wedding. According to the Director General of Islamic Community Guidance at the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Advisory Board for the Development of Marriage Preservation (BP4) must increase its capacity by providing more premarital education to couples about to marry.

The "Make Me Halalmu" program represents an innovative approach in premarital counseling by integrating guidance services with partner introduction mechanisms. This innovation has proven effective in attracting public interest, as indicated by the high number of participants.

However, the program also reveals certain limitations. The relatively low success rate in leading participants to marriage indicates that attraction does not necessarily translate into program effectiveness. This suggests that the program functions more effectively as an entry point for engagement rather than as a determinant of successful marital outcomes.

Thus, the innovation aspect of the program needs to be complemented with a more structured mentoring and follow-up system to enhance its impact.

For example, premarital education in Western countries is offered for six months with a structured program. A more comprehensive premarital education program for Indonesians is expected to be a solution to the high divorce rate and marital unhappiness in Indonesia today. In Catholic communities in Indonesia, premarital counseling, grounded in religious knowledge, has become more developed. Couples planning to marry are required to attend premarital counseling as a prerequisite for a church blessing. The program and duration of premarital counseling vary, typically requiring six to two months before the wedding.

The study identifies several challenges in the implementation of premarital counseling, including limited funding, restricted participant capacity, and low commitment among participants. These challenges indicate structural and behavioral constraints that affect program effectiveness.

From an institutional perspective, limited resources hinder the program's ability to reach a wider audience. Meanwhile, from the participant perspective, low engagement reflects the perception that premarital counseling is not a primary

necessity. These findings imply that improving program effectiveness requires not only technical adjustments but also strengthening public awareness and institutional support.

One strategy for implementing premarital counseling is online. This type of counseling emerged during the pandemic. Online counseling has many advantages over offline counseling (Ardimen, Nelwati, Gustina, & Adripen, 2023; Sunami, 2023). Furthermore, Muslim counselors have distinct advantages when conducting online counseling (Mulawarman et al., 2023). However, there are still questions about the criteria for professional counselors (Alt & Boniel-Nissim, 2022).

The convenience and flexibility of online counseling make it easier for counselors to schedule (Wellyan & Dewi, 2023). Counselors can observe clients' expressions and satisfaction after conducting structured and scheduled online counseling (Li et al., 2023; Zeren, Erus, Amanvermez, Genc, & Duy, 2022). Furthermore, it can incorporate text-based materials into the delivery (Nakayama, Sugihara, Suzuki, & Hatanaka, 2023).

It is undeniable that, within the Indonesian family structure, the extended family influences a person's values and motivations for action. For example, when extended families choose a partner to live with, they participate in a family deliberation to consider who will become the partner of their children, grandchildren, or ancestors, taking into account their background, education, customs, and principles. Potential partners are only accepted if they are deemed compatible with the same family; otherwise, parents often ask their children to sever ties with them.

Ultimately, the values held within the extended family after marriage can influence relationships with their partners, for example, in determining roles within the household and parenting styles. When two people from families with opposing customs and values marry, conflict can be expected if they cannot accept and understand these differences. Therefore, couples contemplating marriage need to understand the values and customs of their partner's extended family and understand how these impact them.

Researchers concluded that the most beneficial topics in premarital counseling were communication, finances, conflict resolution, parenting, relationships with in-laws/parents, roles and responsibilities within the household, family of origin, sexuality, religion, commitment, and leisure/recreation. Marriage, in Islam, is one of the requirements for the perfection of an individual's religion. Even if someone possesses a high level of piety, if they are not married, they have

only fulfilled half of their religious obligations. Marriage is a way to unite two people who long for each other (Albantaby, 2014).

A household should be built on harmony between partners who love and care for each other, so that each party feels at peace and there is happiness in the household. Furthermore, the purpose of marriage is to produce legitimate children for future generations. Islam encourages its followers to choose a partner who is religiously upright until they can have children, as expected from the purpose of marriage (Ismaya, 2012).

Couples must face several consequences in marriage. Marriage, especially for women, is one of the trials of life. One of the requirements for a wife to enter Paradise is gaining her husband's approval. Therefore, a woman must thoroughly understand the various aspects of marriage preparation (Azzam, 2012).

Readiness for marriage is the state of being ready to enter a relationship with a man or woman, accepting the responsibilities of a partner, engaging in sexual intercourse, managing family life, and raising children. Readiness for marriage also occurs when a person has completed adolescence and is physically, educationally, emotionally, financially, and personally ready to experience the responsibilities and privileges of marriage (Lestari, 2013).

A person who is about to marry must meet the following criteria: maturity, open and empathetic communication, good emotional maturity, independence, good religious practices, good self-esteem, openness, and sufficient age (Mukhoyyaroh, 2014).

Marriage is the foundation for a family. A family will be satisfying, enjoyable, and bring happiness if prepared carefully. This preparation should focus on self-preparation or mental readiness in planning family life. Without preparation, it will be futile.

Mental health serves as a means of maintaining and avoiding future problems or difficulties, providing an opportunity for individuals to behave as they wish and make appropriate adjustments to various life situations. Prospective brides and grooms should seriously consider this issue of mental readiness (Walgito, 2002).

Adjusting to a change in status is not easy because it is associated with psychological stress. Therefore, before proceeding to marriage, prospective couples must first be psychologically prepared (Rakimin, 2012). The most fundamental and common adaptation issues in marriage that impact happiness include adjustment to one's partner, sexual adjustment, financial adjustment, and adjustment to other

members of each party's family. Therefore, only mature individuals should have a sense of responsibility for each party, as well as knowledge and understanding of the proportional rights and obligations of both parties.

Conclusion

The implementation of the premarital counseling program at the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) in Surakarta has been conducted in accordance with established procedural standards, reflecting a structured and systematic approach. The program demonstrates procedural effectiveness, particularly in organizing counseling stages and involving multidisciplinary facilitators to support participants' preparation for marriage.

However, from an evaluative perspective, the program has not yet achieved substantive effectiveness. The current evaluation practices are still limited to short-term indicators, such as participation rates and immediate feedback, without adequately measuring long-term outcomes related to marital readiness, relationship quality, and conflict management. This limitation makes it difficult to determine the actual impact of the program on participants' post-marital life.

The "Make Me Halalmu" program represents an important innovation in increasing public engagement with premarital counseling services, although its contribution appears to be stronger in attracting participation rather than ensuring successful marital outcomes. In addition, structural constraints, such as limited funding and program capacity, as well as low participant commitment, continue to affect program effectiveness. These findings indicate the need for strengthening both the evaluation framework and the sustainability of program implementation.

It is recommended that the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) develop a more comprehensive evaluation system that integrates both process and long-term outcome indicators, particularly those related to marital readiness, relationship quality, and conflict management. Strengthening program design through structured mentoring and follow-up mechanisms is essential to ensure that knowledge gained during counseling translates into sustained behavioral change. In addition, increased institutional support, especially in terms of funding and program capacity, is necessary to expand access while maintaining service quality. Future research is also encouraged to adopt specific evaluation models and longitudinal approaches in order to provide a more robust assessment of the long-term effectiveness of premarital counseling programs.

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