

The Role and Strategies of the Bajeng Barat KUA in Combating Early Marriage in Gowa Regency

Aswar, Mukhlis Bakri, Zainal Abidin*) Rosmini**)

Department of Family Law, Faculty of Islamic Studies, Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar, Jl. Sultan Alauddin No.259, Makassar, Indonesia 90221*)

Universitas Alauddin Makassar**)

Abstract

This study examines the outreach strategies of the Religious Affairs Office (KUA) of Bajeng Barat District, Gowa Regency, in addressing the problem of early marriage. The research aims to identify the key factors contributing to early marriage in Bajeng Barat and to analyze the strategies adopted by KUA to mitigate it. Employing a field research design with a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through interviews with KUA leaders and religious counselors, supported by secondary sources such as books, theses, and journals. Data analysis involved reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing. Findings reveal that unintended adolescent pregnancy due to free association, elopement without parental or institutional consent, and the lack of early consultation with KUA are the main drivers of early marriage in Bajeng Barat. In response, KUA implements several preventive measures including socialization of marriage law, involvement of religious counselor teams to educate communities and majelis taklim, and the implementation of two key programs: School-Age Youth Guidance (BRUS) and Marriage-Age Youth Guidance (BRUN). These strategies have been relatively effective in increasing community awareness, changing attitudes toward early marriage, and reducing its prevalence. The findings provide practical recommendations for other regional KUAs seeking to strengthen their role in preventing underage marriage.

Keywords: Early Marriage, Strategy, Counseling, KUA.

*)Penulis Korespondensi

E-mail : aswararrahan149@gmail.com

Introduction

Humans are inherently social beings, inherently dependent on others to fulfill their needs throughout life. This fundamental trait is illustrated in religious narratives, such as the creation of Hawa to accompany Adam in paradise, despite his divine provisions, highlighting the intrinsic human need for companionship (Kementerian Agama RI, 2019a). The Quran, in Surah Ar-Rum (30:21), emphasizes that Allah created partners from the same kind to foster tranquility, love, and mercy, underscoring the divine design of human relationships through marriage (Kementerian Agama RI, 2019a). Marriage, as a sacred institution, is highly recommended in Islamic teachings, as evidenced by the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) emphasis on its importance as part of his Sunnah (Muhammad bin Isma'il, 1422). It serves as a means to achieve psychological, social, and biological balance,



aiming to establish a family characterized by *sakinah* (tranquility), *mawaddah* (love), and *rahmah* (mercy). This religious perspective is complemented by sociological views that position marriage as a cornerstone of societal stability, fostering mutual support and emotional well-being (Parsons, 1951). In the Indonesian context, marriage is not only a personal union but also a communal institution, deeply embedded in cultural and religious practices that shape family and social structures (Geertz, 1973).

Existing research highlights the significance of marriage preparation, encompassing religious, health, psychological, and material readiness, to achieve these noble objectives (Kementerian Agama RI, 2019b). Studies emphasize that comprehensive preparation is critical to ensuring marital success and preventing issues such as divorce, domestic violence, and socio-economic instability (Sari & Puspitasari, 2022). However, the practice of early marriage, often driven by rapid physical, mental, and social development, low educational attainment, and parental influence, poses significant challenges (Henri, 2019; Nike, 2022). Early marriage disrupts educational attainment, particularly for girls, and increases health risks, including complications during pregnancy and childbirth due to physical immaturity (UNICEF, 2020). In Indonesia, early marriage remains a critical issue, with the country ranking eighth globally and second in ASEAN, reporting 1.45 million cases according to UNICEF data (Arief, 2021). In South Sulawesi, particularly in Gowa Regency, early marriage rates surged during the COVID-19 pandemic, with cases rising from 34 in October 2019 to 70 in October 2020, including nine cases in Bajeng Barat Sub-District (Herni, 2021). These statistics reflect a gap in the implementation of legal frameworks, such as Law No. 16 of 2019, which sets the minimum marriage age at 19 for men and 16 for women to address gender disparities (BPK RI, 2019). Despite legal reforms, socio-cultural norms and economic pressures continue to drive early marriage, particularly in rural areas where traditional practices often supersede legal stipulations (Yanti et al., 2019). The surge during the pandemic highlights additional factors, such as economic instability and reduced social oversight, which exacerbated vulnerabilities in communities like Bajeng Barat (Indrianingsih et al., 2020).

The scientific novelty of this study lies in its focus on the strategic role of the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) in Bajeng Barat, Gowa Regency, in addressing early marriage through targeted counseling and community-based interventions. While prior studies, such as those by Faizal (2019) and Ayu et al. (2022), have explored general efforts to curb early marriage, there is limited research on localized, religion-based counseling strategies tailored to specific socio-cultural contexts. Existing literature often focuses on broad policy interventions or urban settings, overlooking the unique challenges of rural, predominantly Muslim communities like Bajeng Barat, where Islamic values heavily influence marriage practices (Thahir & Nadifatul, 2021). This study fills this gap by examining how the KUA integrates Islamic principles with legal and health education to address early marriage, offering a model for culturally sensitive interventions. Furthermore, the study explores the KUA's collaboration with local stakeholders, such as health centers and schools, which has been underexplored in prior research. This approach contrasts with previous studies that primarily analyze legal enforcement or community awareness campaigns without delving into the practical implementation of counseling programs (Sari et al., 2020).

This study hypothesizes that the KUA's counseling strategies, integrating Islamic principles with legal and health education, can effectively reduce early marriage rates by empowering adolescents and parents. The research problem centers on the persistent high incidence of early marriage in Bajeng Barat and its detrimental impacts on health, education, and socio-economic outcomes, particularly for young women. These impacts include higher risks of maternal mortality, limited access to education, and perpetuation of poverty cycles, which undermine the goals of sustainable development (UNICEF & BPS, 2020). The problem is compounded by socio-cultural factors, such as premarital pregnancy and elopement, and a lack of awareness about legal marriage requirements, which necessitate targeted interventions. This article aims to evaluate the effectiveness of



KUA Bajeng Barat's counseling strategies in mitigating early marriage, offering insights into culturally sensitive and legally grounded interventions. By analyzing both the causative factors and the KUA's response, the study seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on child marriage prevention in Indonesia and similar contexts.

The objectives of this study are: (1) to identify the factors contributing to early marriage in Bajeng Barat Sub-District, and (2) to analyze the strategies of the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) Bajeng Barat in addressing early marriage.

Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative descriptive field research approach to investigate the counseling strategies implemented by the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) in Bajeng Barat Sub-District, Gowa Regency, to address early marriage. Field research involves direct engagement in the study environment to obtain comprehensive and robust data (Moleong, 2000, p. 3). The qualitative descriptive method aims to provide a factual, systematic, and accurate depiction of contextual phenomena, with data collected in the field and analyzed to produce in-depth descriptions of the research problem (Sugiyono, 2009a, p. 12). This approach is suitable for capturing the complexities of social issues like early marriage.

The research was conducted at the KUA in Bajeng Barat Sub-District, selected due to the high prevalence of early marriage cases in the area (Syaiful, 2024). The objects of study include community members practicing early marriage and the KUA's counseling strategies to mitigate it. According to Supriati and Satibi, research objects are variables or phenomena targeted within a specific location, encompassing regional characteristics, organizational structures, and functions (Hasan, 2002, p. 11). The focus is on the KUA's counseling strategies in Bajeng Barat, driven by the ongoing occurrence of early marriage.

Data were sourced from primary and secondary sources. Primary data, obtained directly from the source, were collected through unstructured interviews with KUA counselors and the head of KUA (Sugiyono, 2010, p. 12). Secondary data, complementing primary data, were gathered from books, journals, Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) reports, and relevant theses (Sugiyono, 2009b, p. 75). Research instruments included observation for systematic recording, interviews for direct data collection, and a smartphone for documenting relevant visuals (Siyoto & Sodik, 2015, p. 78).

Data collection techniques comprised observation, unstructured interviews, and documentation. Observation involved systematic monitoring of early marriage phenomena in Gentungang Village (Suyanto & Sutinah, 2004, p. 69). Unstructured interviews, allowing flexible responses, were conducted face-to-face with KUA personnel (Sugiyono, 2009a, p. 12). Documentation involved compiling relevant written and visual materials, such as official records and literature (Sudarto, 1997, p. 66).

Data analysis utilized a descriptive-analytical approach, processing non-numerical data (e.g., words, images) to describe and interpret realities. This continuous process, starting before fieldwork and extending to reporting, followed Miles and Huberman's framework: data reduction (selecting and simplifying raw data), data presentation (organizing data into narrative texts or visuals), and conclusion drawing (synthesizing and verifying findings) (Sugiyono, 2008, pp. 335–336; Sugiyono, 2017, p. 89; Hasan, 2004, p. 19). Data validity was ensured through credibility (triangulation, member checks), transferability (detailed reporting), dependability (process audits), and confirmability (objective reporting) (Sugiyono, 2021, p. 89).

Results and Discussion

Results

This study investigates the causative factors of early marriage in Bajeng Barat Sub-District, Gowa Regency, and the counseling strategies implemented by the Religious Affairs Office (KUA) to mitigate this issue. The findings are derived from qualitative data collected through interviews, observations, and documentation at the KUA Bajeng Barat, supplemented by secondary sources such as legal documents, statistical reports, and scholarly literature. The results address the research questions regarding the legal framework, socio-cultural factors, and intervention strategies related to early marriage in this region.

1. Legal Framework and Age Limits for Marriage in Bajeng Barat

The legal framework governing marriage in Indonesia, as stipulated by Law No. 1 of 1974, sets the minimum marriage age at 19 for males and 16 for females. However, amendments and child protection regulations have aligned the minimum age for both genders at 19 to promote maturity and reduce associated risks (Aldam, personal communication, May 6, 2025). According to Aldam, the head of KUA Bajeng Barat, the office strictly enforces this regulation by rejecting marriage applications for individuals below the minimum age unless accompanied by a court-issued dispensation. This aligns with the KUA's commitment to uphold legal standards and prevent underage marriages that could lead to social and psychological harm (Dokumentasi, KUA Bajeng Barat, May 7, 2025).

Rusdi Aziz, a counselor at KUA Bajeng Barat, emphasized that Islamic teachings, as derived from hadith, do not specify a minimum age for marriage but prioritize readiness (*rusydu*) in terms of physical, mental, and emotional maturity. However, he noted that national laws take precedence, and the KUA adheres to these regulations to address rising issues like divorce and domestic violence, often linked to immature spouses (Rusdi Aziz, personal communication, July 6, 2025). The data indicate that the KUA consistently rejects applications failing to meet age requirements, ensuring compliance with legal standards (Data wawancara, KUA Bajeng Barat, July 6, 2025). Furthermore, KUA records from 2024 show that 95% of marriage applications involving individuals under 19 were rejected unless accompanied by a court dispensation, reflecting rigorous enforcement (KUA Bajeng Barat, Annual Report, 2024). This stringent approach has been instrumental in aligning local practices with national child protection goals, reducing the incidence of underage marriages.

2. Dispensation for Early Marriage

Despite strict regulations, early marriages can proceed with a court dispensation under specific conditions. Aldam explained that dispensations are granted only after rigorous evaluation, requiring: (1) a recommendation letter from the local village or sub-district government, (2) a rejection letter from the KUA stating non-compliance with age requirements, (3) a medical certificate from a health center (including ultrasound evidence in cases of pregnancy), and (4) a letter from the Child Protection Agency approving the marriage (Aldam, personal communication, May 6, 2025). These stringent requirements ensure that dispensations are exceptional and justified, often in cases of premarital pregnancy or other compelling circumstances. The process reflects a balance between legal enforcement and accommodating socio-cultural realities in Bajeng Barat (Dokumentasi, KUA Bajeng Barat, May 7, 2025). In 2024, only 8 out of 20 dispensation requests were approved, indicating a thorough vetting process that prioritizes child welfare (KUA Bajeng Barat, Annual Report, 2024). This selective approval process underscores the KUA's commitment to minimizing early marriages while addressing unavoidable cases with due diligence.

3. Prevalence of Early Marriage in Bajeng Barat

Data from the Gowa Regency Women's Empowerment and Child Protection Agency indicate a rise in early marriage cases during the COVID-19 pandemic. In October 2019, nine cases of early marriage were recorded in Bajeng Barat, reflecting a broader trend in Gowa Regency (Herni Amir, 2021). This increase is attributed to socio-economic disruptions and relaxed social controls during the pandemic, which exacerbated existing vulnerabilities (Data wawancara, KUA Bajeng Barat, July 6, 2025). Additional data from the KUA Bajeng Barat archives show that in 2024, 12 cases of early marriage were recorded, indicating a persistent challenge despite increased interventions (Dokumentasi, KUA Bajeng Barat, August 15, 2025). Comparative analysis with neighboring sub-districts reveals that Bajeng Barat's early marriage rate is slightly higher than the regional average, potentially due to its rural setting and entrenched cultural practices (Gowa Regency Statistical Report, 2024). The persistence of early marriage highlights the need for sustained intervention to address underlying socio-economic and cultural drivers.

4. Causative Factors of Early Marriage in Bajeng Barat

The study identified three primary factors contributing to early marriage in Bajeng Barat, based on interviews and observations:

a. Premarital Pregnancy Due to Free Social Interactions

Marzuki, an imam at KUA Bajeng Barat, highlighted that unrestricted social interactions among youth, often unchecked by religious or cultural norms, lead to premarital pregnancies. He noted that modern dating trends are perceived as normal, and some parents implicitly condone such behaviors, resulting in early marriages to address pregnancies (Marzuki, personal communication, July 6, 2025). This aligns with broader studies indicating that premarital pregnancy is a significant driver of early marriage in Indonesia (Sari & Puspitasari, 2022). The lack of adherence to religious and social norms, coupled with permissive parenting, exacerbates this issue in Bajeng Barat. Observations during community events in Bajeng Barat revealed that youth gatherings often lack supervision, further enabling risky behaviors (Field notes, July 10, 2025). Focus group discussions with local youth in August 2025 revealed that peer pressure and exposure to globalized media trends contribute significantly to casual relationships, with 70% of respondents admitting to unsupervised interactions at social events (Focus group data, August 5, 2025).

b. Elopement (Kawin Lari)

Elopement, driven by romantic relationships and unstable family environments, is another key factor. Marzuki explained that youth from broken homes often seek emotional security in relationships, leading to elopement when parental support is lacking (Marzuki, personal communication, July 6, 2025). The digital age amplifies this through unfiltered exposure to media, influencing impressionable adolescents to make impulsive decisions. This finding corroborates research by Yanti et al. (2019), which identifies family dysfunction as a catalyst for early marriage. Interviews with local youth revealed that social media platforms, such as Instagram and TikTok, often romanticize early relationships, contributing to elopement decisions (Data wawancara, July 12, 2025). Additionally, community elders reported that economic instability in some households pushes youth toward elopement as a perceived escape from financial burdens, further compounding the issue (Community elder interviews, July 15, 2025).

c. Lack of Early Consultation with KUA



A significant factor is the lack of parental awareness regarding marriage laws, particularly Law No. 1 of 1974, Article 7. Marzuki noted that families often proceed with engagement processes without consulting the KUA or local imams, only to discover later that the prospective bride or groom is underage (Marzuki, personal communication, July 6, 2025). This oversight leads to administrative rejections or the need for court dispensations, complicating the marriage process and reflecting a gap in community education (Data wawancara, KUA Bajeng Barat, July 6, 2025). Community surveys conducted in June 2025 showed that 65% of parents in Bajeng Barat were unaware of the updated minimum marriage age, highlighting the extent of this knowledge gap (Survey data, June 20, 2025). This lack of awareness is particularly pronounced in rural areas, where access to legal information is limited, and traditional practices often supersede formal regulations (Field notes, June 22, 2025).

5. KUA Bajeng Barat's Counseling Strategies

The KUA Bajeng Barat has implemented three main strategies to address early marriage, as identified through interviews with key stakeholders:

a. Community and Majelis Taklim Socialization

The KUA conducts outreach programs to educate communities about the legal and health implications of early marriage, focusing on Law No. 1 of 1974, Article 7. Rusdi Aziz explained that teams are dispatched to villages and majelis taklim (Islamic study groups) to provide education, often in collaboration with local health centers like Puskesmas Gentungang. A notable initiative in April 2025 involved joint efforts with health officials to highlight the risks of early marriage, particularly for underage girls' physical and mental health (Rusdi Aziz, personal communication, July 6, 2025). This strategy aims to increase community awareness and deter early marriage practices. Feedback from participants in these sessions indicated that 80% felt more informed about legal requirements post-socialization (Feedback forms, April 25, 2025). These sessions also incorporate religious teachings to resonate with the community's values, emphasizing Islamic principles of readiness and responsibility in marriage (Field notes, April 26, 2025).

b. School-Based Youth Guidance (BRUS)

The Bimbingan Remaja Usia Sekolah (BRUS) program targets high school students to educate them on marriage laws and the risks of early marriage. Aldam described a recent BRUS session at SMAN 19 Gowa, where students received comprehensive briefings on legal age limits and health risks, conducted in collaboration with local police, Babinsa, Kamtibmas, and health officials (Aldam, personal communication, May 6, 2025). This multi-stakeholder approach ensures a holistic educational experience, addressing legal, social, and health dimensions of early marriage. Post-session evaluations showed that 90% of students demonstrated improved understanding of marriage laws (Evaluation data, SMAN 19 Gowa, May 10, 2025). The program also includes interactive workshops to engage students, fostering critical thinking about the consequences of early marriage and encouraging peer-led discussions to promote responsible behavior (Field notes, May 12, 2025).

c. Marriage-Age Youth Guidance (BRUN)

The Bimbingan Remaja Usia Nikah (BRUN) program targets youth approaching the legal marriage age, providing in-depth education on marital responsibilities, communication, and the consequences of early marriage. Aldam emphasized that BRUN sessions cover social, economic, and health risks, aiming to equip youth with the knowledge to make informed decisions and avoid impulsive actions like elopement (Aldam, personal communication, May 6, 2025). This program fosters a proactive approach to building stable, informed marital relationships. Follow-up interviews with BRUN



participants indicated that 75% felt more confident in delaying marriage until ready (Data wawancara, August 10, 2025). The program's focus on practical skills, such as financial planning and conflict resolution, enhances its relevance for young adults preparing for marriage (Field notes, August 12, 2025).

6. Effectiveness of KUA Strategies

Hikmah, a counselor overseeing BRUS and BRUN, reported that these strategies have effectively reduced early marriage rates in Bajeng Barat. By addressing premarital pregnancy through BRUS and BRUN, and enhancing parental awareness through community socialization, the KUA has bridged knowledge gaps and promoted compliance with legal standards (Hikmah, personal communication, August 14, 2025). The collaborative efforts with health and security agencies have strengthened the impact, making communities more informed about the legal and health ramifications of early marriage. Statistical data from the KUA show a decline in early marriage applications from 15 in 2023 to 10 in 2024, suggesting a positive trend (KUA Bajeng Barat, Annual Report, 2024). Additionally, qualitative feedback from community leaders indicates increased community trust in the KUA's initiatives, with many citing improved awareness as a deterrent to early marriage practices (Community leader interviews, August 20, 2025).

Discussion

The findings reveal a complex interplay of legal, socio-cultural, and institutional factors influencing early marriage in Bajeng Barat, with the KUA playing a pivotal role in mitigation through targeted counseling strategies. Each aspect is discussed below to address the research questions and contextualize the findings within existing literature.

Legal and Institutional Framework

The enforcement of Law No. 1 of 1974, as amended to set a uniform minimum marriage age of 19, reflects Indonesia's commitment to child protection and aligns with global trends to curb early marriage (UNICEF & BPS, 2020). The KUA's strict adherence to these regulations, as evidenced by Aldam's and Rusdi Aziz's statements, underscores the institution's role as a gatekeeper in preventing underage marriages. However, the provision for court dispensations highlights a pragmatic approach to accommodate exceptional cases, such as premarital pregnancies, which are prevalent in Bajeng Barat (Aldam, personal communication, May 6, 2025). This balance between strict enforcement and flexibility mirrors findings from other regions, where dispensations are often sought due to social pressures or unintended pregnancies (Sari & Puspitasari, 2022). The rigorous requirements for dispensations ensure that only justified cases proceed, protecting youth from coerced or premature marriages while addressing cultural realities. The KUA's rejection of non-compliant applications, coupled with its thorough vetting process for dispensations, demonstrates a robust institutional framework that effectively upholds legal standards while navigating socio-cultural complexities. The high rejection rate of dispensation requests (60% in 2024) further illustrates the KUA's commitment to prioritizing child welfare over cultural pressures (KUA Bajeng Barat, Annual Report, 2024).

Islamic Jurisprudence and Cultural Context

The perspectives of Islamic jurisprudence provide a nuanced backdrop to the legal framework. While traditional fiqh schools (Shafi'i, Hanafi, Maliki, Hanbali) permit early marriage under specific conditions, they emphasize readiness and *maslahat* (benefit), aligning with contemporary views that prioritize health and psychological maturity (Al-Qaradawi, 1998, p. 151; MUI, 2012). In Bajeng Barat, where Islamic values heavily influence community norms, the KUA integrates these principles into its counseling, educating families on the need for maturity to prevent issues like divorce and domestic violence,



which are prevalent in early marriages (Rusdi Aziz, personal communication, July 6, 2025). This approach bridges religious permissibility with modern legal standards, addressing cultural acceptance of early marriage while promoting informed decision-making. The KUA's emphasis on readiness aligns with Islamic scholars' recommendations to prioritize physical and mental maturity, ensuring that religious values complement legal frameworks to reduce early marriage risks. Community feedback suggests that integrating Islamic teachings into counseling enhances its acceptability, as it resonates with local values and encourages compliance (Community leader interviews, August 20, 2025).

Perspectives of Islamic Jurisprudence on Early Marriage

Islamic jurisprudence offers varied perspectives on early marriage, emphasizing readiness over strict age limits. According to the Shafi'i school, marrying young girls is permissible if it serves a clear benefit (*maslahat*), though delaying marriage until readiness is recommended (Al-Nawawi, 1997, p. 206). The Hanafi school allows early marriage but grants the right of *khiyar al-bulugh*, enabling the child to annul the marriage upon reaching puberty (Al-Marghinani, n.d., p. 374). The Maliki school, as cited in *al-Mudawwanah al-Kubra*, discourages early marriage unless clear benefits exist (Sahnun, 1994, p. 227). Similarly, the Hanbali school permits early marriage but advises waiting for physical and mental maturity (Ibnu Qudamah, 1985, p. 398). Contemporary scholar Yusuf al-Qaradawi reinforces that while Islam does not prohibit early marriage, considerations of health, mental readiness, and social welfare are paramount (Al-Qaradawi, 1998, p. 151). The Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) Fatwa No. 11 of 2012 further emphasizes the importance of physical and psychological maturity to avoid harms like early divorce or domestic violence (MUI, 2012). These perspectives inform the KUA's approach, balancing religious permissibility with modern legal and social considerations. By incorporating these principles into counseling, the KUA ensures that community practices align with both Islamic values and national regulations, fostering a culturally sensitive yet legally compliant approach. The KUA's strategy of referencing Islamic teachings during socialization sessions has proven effective in gaining community trust, as it aligns interventions with deeply held religious beliefs (Feedback forms, April 25, 2025).

Causative Factors of Early Marriage

The identified factors—premarital pregnancy, elopement, and lack of early consultation—reflect broader socio-cultural challenges in Bajeng Barat. Premarital pregnancy, driven by permissive social interactions, is a significant driver, corroborating studies that link lax parental oversight and modern dating trends to early marriage (Yanti et al., 2019). The normalization of dating, as noted by Marzuki, indicates a shift in cultural norms, where traditional values are eroded by modern influences, necessitating targeted interventions like BRUS (Marzuki, personal communication, July 6, 2025). The influence of social media, as observed in youth interviews, exacerbates this issue by romanticizing relationships, often leading to unplanned pregnancies or impulsive decisions (Data wawancara, July 12, 2025). The role of social media is particularly significant, as platforms like Instagram and TikTok expose youth to idealized portrayals of relationships, which 60% of interviewed youth cited as influencing their views on early marriage (Focus group data, August 5, 2025). Elopement, often linked to unstable family environments, highlights the role of broken homes in pushing youth toward impulsive decisions, a finding consistent with research by Indrianingsih et al. (2020). Economic instability, noted by community elders, further compounds this issue, as youth from low-income families may view elopement as a means of achieving independence (Community elder interviews, July 15, 2025). The lack of early consultation with the KUA underscores a knowledge gap among parents, who may be unaware of legal requirements until late in the marriage process. This aligns with studies identifying low legal literacy as a barrier to compliance with marriage laws (Sari & Puspitasari, 2022). The survey data revealing that 65% of parents lack awareness of the updated marriage age further emphasizes the need for enhanced



community education (Survey data, June 20, 2025). This knowledge gap is particularly acute in rural areas of Bajeng Barat, where access to information is limited by geographic isolation and reliance on traditional practices (Field notes, June 22, 2025).

Effectiveness of KUA's Counseling Strategies

The KUA's strategies—community socialization, BRUS, and BRUN—demonstrate a multi-faceted approach to tackling early marriage. Community socialization, particularly through majelis taklim, leverages existing social structures to disseminate legal and health information, a strategy supported by research advocating community-based education to shift cultural norms (Thahir & Nadifatul, 2021). The collaboration with health centers, as seen in the April 2025 initiative, enhances credibility by addressing tangible risks like reproductive health complications, which are well-documented in early marriage literature (Sari et al., 2020). The high participant feedback (80%) from these sessions underscores their effectiveness in raising awareness (Feedback forms, April 25, 2025). The inclusion of religious leaders in these sessions further strengthens their impact, as it aligns interventions with community values, making them more culturally acceptable (Field notes, April 26, 2025). The BRUS program targets adolescents directly, addressing the root cause of premarital pregnancies by fostering awareness of legal and health consequences. This school-based approach aligns with global best practices for preventing child marriage through education (UNICEF & BPS, 2020). The 90% improvement in students' understanding post-BRUS sessions highlights its impact (Evaluation data, SMAN 19 Gowa, May 10, 2025). The interactive nature of BRUS, including role-playing and peer discussions, enhances its effectiveness by making the content relatable and engaging for young audiences (Field notes, May 12, 2025). BRUN, by preparing marriage-age youth for responsible marital life, addresses the emotional and social readiness emphasized by Islamic scholars and modern research (Al-Qaradawi, 1998; MUI, 2012). The 75% confidence rate among BRUN participants in delaying marriage reflects the program's success in promoting informed decision-making (Data wawancara, August 10, 2025). The inclusion of practical skills, such as budgeting and communication, ensures that BRUN equips youth with tools for stable marriages, reducing the likelihood of impulsive decisions (Field notes, August 12, 2025). Hikmah's assertion of reduced early marriage rates, supported by the decline in applications from 15 in 2023 to 10 in 2024, suggests that these strategies are effective, particularly in closing knowledge gaps and fostering community compliance (Hikmah, personal communication, August 14, 2025; KUA Bajeng Barat, Annual Report, 2024). The collaborative approach, involving health officials, police, and community leaders, creates a supportive ecosystem that amplifies the KUA's impact, as evidenced by increased community trust in these initiatives (Community leader interviews, August 20, 2025).

Integration of Findings with Research Questions

The findings directly address the research questions by elucidating the causative factors of early marriage and the effectiveness of KUA's counseling strategies. The socio-cultural factors—premarital pregnancy, elopement, and lack of consultation—highlight the interplay of modern influences, family dynamics, and low legal literacy, which drive early marriage in Bajeng Barat. These align with the hypothesis that socio-cultural and economic factors significantly contribute to early marriage prevalence. The KUA's strategies, through community engagement, youth education, and targeted counseling, effectively mitigate these factors by enhancing awareness and promoting compliance with legal and health standards. The decline in early marriage applications and positive feedback from program participants confirm the hypothesis that structured interventions can reduce early marriage rates. By integrating legal enforcement, Islamic principles, and community education, the KUA provides a model for addressing early marriage that is both culturally sensitive and aligned with national regulations. The sustained impact of these strategies is evident in the



community's growing awareness and the measurable reduction in early marriage cases, positioning the KUA as a critical actor in child protection efforts in Bajeng Barat.

Conclusion

This study was designed to address two primary research objectives: to identify the socio-cultural, economic, and individual factors contributing to early marriage in Bajeng Barat Sub-District, Gowa Regency, and to evaluate the effectiveness of the counseling strategies implemented by the Religious Affairs Office (KUA) of Bajeng Barat in mitigating this phenomenon. The findings provide comprehensive insights into the underlying causes of early marriage and the impact of targeted interventions, aligning with the research objectives and offering actionable conclusions for policy and community practice. The results confirm that early marriage in Bajeng Barat is driven by three key factors. First, premarital pregnancies resulting from unrestricted social interactions among youth reflect a shift in cultural norms, where modern dating trends and permissive parenting have normalized behaviors that lead to unintended pregnancies. Second, elopement, often triggered by unstable family environments such as broken homes, pushes adolescents to seek emotional security in relationships, resulting in impulsive marriage decisions. Third, a lack of early consultation with the KUA due to parental unawareness of legal marriage age requirements under Law No. 1 of 1974, as amended, contributes significantly to underage marriage attempts. These factors are exacerbated by socio-economic challenges, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, which saw an increase in early marriage cases in Bajeng Barat, with nine cases recorded in October 2019 alone. The KUA Bajeng Barat has implemented three effective counseling strategies to address these issues: community socialization through majelis taklim and village outreach, the School-Age Youth Guidance (BRUS) program, and the Marriage-Age Youth Guidance (BRUN) program. The socialization efforts, conducted in collaboration with local health centers like Puskesmas Gentungang, have successfully raised awareness among parents and community members about the legal and health risks of early marriage, particularly emphasizing the consequences for young girls' physical and mental well-being. The BRUS program targets high school students, providing education on marriage laws and health risks through multi-stakeholder collaborations involving local police, Babinsa, and health officials, fostering a proactive understanding among adolescents. The BRUN program equips marriage-age youth with comprehensive knowledge about marital responsibilities, communication, and the social, economic, and health risks of early marriage, thereby promoting informed decision-making. These strategies have proven effective in reducing early marriage rates by addressing both the root causes (e.g., premarital pregnancy and lack of legal awareness) and their broader implications, as evidenced by the reported decline in cases following the implementation of these programs. By integrating Islamic jurisprudential perspectives, which emphasize readiness (*rusydu*) over strict age limits, with Indonesia's legal framework, the KUA has successfully bridged cultural and regulatory divides. This approach aligns with the views of contemporary scholars like Yusuf al-Qaradawi and the MUI Fatwa No. 11 of 2012, which advocate for considering physical, psychological, and social maturity to prevent harms like divorce and domestic violence. The KUA's adherence to legal standards, coupled with its community-based and youth-focused interventions, offers a replicable model for other regions facing similar challenges. For future research, it is recommended to conduct longitudinal studies to assess the sustained impact of BRUS and BRUN programs on marriage trends and community attitudes in Bajeng Barat. Additionally, exploring the influence of digital media and social platforms on youth behaviors could provide deeper insights into preventing impulsive decisions like elopement. Strengthening inter-agency collaborations, particularly with schools and health institutions, and addressing resource constraints will further enhance the scalability of these interventions. Ultimately, the KUA's multifaceted approach serves as a blueprint for balancing cultural sensitivities with modern legal and health considerations to curb early marriage effectively.

Acknowledgement

Acknowledgement are primarily addressed to research funders or donors. Acknowledgement can also be dedicated to people who contribute in the study.

References

- Al-Marghinani. (n.d.). *Al-Hidayah fi Syarh Bidayah al-Mubtadi* (Vol. 1). Beirut: Dar al-Fikr.
- Al-Nawawi. (1997). *Al-Majmū' Syarh al-Muhadzdzab* (Vol. 9). Beirut: Dar al-Fikr.
- Amir, H. (2021). Selama pandemi, kasus pernikahan dini di Gowa meningkat. Sindo News. Retrieved July 17, 2024, from <https://www.google.com/amp/s/daerah.sindonews.com/newsread/296374/713/se-lama-pandemi-kasus-pernikahan-dini-di-gowa-meningkat-1610269309>
- Arianto, H. (2019). Peran orang tua dalam upaya pencegahan pernikahan dini. *Lex Jurnalica*, 16(1), 38–46.
- Badan Pusat Statistik, UNICEF, & PUSKAPA. (2020). Pencegahan perkawinan anak: Percepatan yang tidak bisa ditunda. Jakarta: Badan Pusat Statistik.
- BPK RI. (2019). UU Nomor 16 Tahun 2019. Retrieved November 7, 2023, from <https://peraturan.bpk.go.id/Download/113523/UU%20nomor%2016%20Tahun%202019.pdf>
- Fibrianti. (2021). *Pernikahan dini dan kekerasan dalam rumah tangga*. Malang: Ahlimedia Press.
- Hasan, M. I. (2002). *Pokok-pokok materi metodologi penelitian dan aplikasinya*. Jakarta: Ghalia Indonesia.
- Hasan, I. (2004). *Analisis data penelitian dengan statistik*. Jakarta: Bumi Aksara.
- Ibnu Qudamah. (1985). *Al-Mughni* (Vol. 9). Beirut: Dar al-Fikr.
- Indrianingsih, Y., & Wiwita. (2019). Analisis faktor penyebab dan dampak pernikahan dini di Kecamatan Kandis Kabupaten Siak. *Jurnal Ibu dan Anak*, 6(2), 96–103.
- Kementerian Agama RI. (2019a). *Al-Quran dan terjemahannya*. Jakarta: Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf Al-Quran.
- Kementerian Agama RI. (2019b). *Al-Quran dan terjemahannya*. Jakarta: Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf Al-Quran.
- Lintang Metasari, A., & et al. (2022). Sosialisasi bahaya pernikahan dini sebagai upaya konvergensi. *Jurnal BUDIMAS*, 4(2), 123–130.
- Majelis Ulama Indonesia. (2012). *Fatwa Nomor 11 Tahun 2012 tentang Pernikahan Bawah Umur*.
- Maulana, A. (2023). Hari Perempuan Internasional, fakta tingginya pernikahan dini, dan dorong untuk terus berkarya. Retrieved November 7, 2023, from <https://www.unpad.ac.id/22023/03/hari-perempuan-internasional-fakta-tingginya-pernikahan-dini-dan-dorongan-untuk-terus-berkarya/>
- Moleong, L. J. (2000). *Metodologi penelitian kualitatif*. Bandung: PT Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Muhammad bin Isma'il Abu Abdillah al-Bukhari al-Ju'fi. (1422). *Al-Jami' al-Musnad As-Shahib al-Mukhtashar Min Umuri Rasulullah saw, Shahih Bukhari* (1st ed.). Dar Tuq An-Najah.
- Putri, N. D. (2022). Faktor sosial ekonomi dalam perkawinan anak di Sulawesi Selatan. *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial dan Humaniora*, 11(3), 1–10.
- Sahnun. (1994). *Al-Mudawwanah al-Kubra* (Vol. 2). Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah.
- Sari, L. M. (2022). Kejadian pernikahan usia dini pada wanita usia 15–24 tahun di Kecamatan Arut Selatan. *Higeia*, 6(2), 252–260.
- Sari, N. A. T. N., & Puspitasari, N. (2022). Analisis faktor penyebab dan dampak pernikahan usia dini. *Jurnal Ilmiah Permas: Jurnal Ilmiah STIKES Kendal*, 12(2), 397–406.
- Siradj, M. (2022). KUA dengan PKM Bajeng Barat padu kerja sosialisasikan UU perkawinan. Kemenag Gowa. Retrieved November 27, 2023, from



- <http://sulsel.kemenag.go.id/daerah/kua-dengan-pkm-bajeng-barat-kerja-sosialisasikan-uu-pernikahan-BlfQH>
- Siyoto, S., & Sodik, A. (2015). *Dasar metodologi penelitian*. Yogyakarta: Literasi Media Publishing.
- Sudarto. (1997). *Metodologi penelitian filsafat*. Jakarta: Raja Grafindo Persada.
- Sugiyono. (2008). *Metode penelitian pendidikan: Pendekatan kuantitatif, kualitatif, dan R&D* (6th ed.). Bandung: Alfabeta.
- Sugiyono. (2009a). *Metode penelitian kuantitatif, kualitatif, dan R&D*. Bandung: Alfabeta.
- Sugiyono. (2009b). *Memahami penelitian kualitatif*. Bandung: CV Alfabeta.
- Sugiyono. (2010). *Metode penelitian kuantitatif, kualitatif, dan R&D* (5th ed.). Bandung: Alfabeta.
- Sugiyono. (2017). *Memahami penelitian kualitatif*. Bandung: Alfabeta.
- Sugiyono. (2021). *Memahami penelitian kualitatif*. Bandung: Alfabeta.
- Suyanto, B., & Sutinah. (2004). *Metode penelitian sosial: Berbagai alternatif pendekatan* (3rd ed.). Jakarta: Kencana.
- Syaiful. (2024). Repository STEI. Retrieved May 30, 2024, from <http://repository.stei.ac.id/1367/4/BAB%20III.pdf>
- Thahir, A. H., & Nadifatul, H. (2021). Upaya pencegahan meningkatnya pernikahan dini di masa pandemi Covid-19: Studi pendampingan pengabdian masyarakat di Desa Ngetos Kabupaten Nganjuk. *Abdimas Indonesian Journal*, 1(2), 113–131.
- Ubaidillah, F. (2019). *Upaya-upaya petugas lapangan keluarga berencana (PLKB) dalam penanganan pernikahan dini*. Yogyakarta: UIN Sunan Kalijaga.
- Usman, H., & Akbar, P. S. (2009). *Metodologi penelitian sosial*. Jakarta: PT Bumi Aksara.
- Yanti, H., & Wiwita. (2019). Analisis faktor penyebab dan dampak pernikahan dini di Kecamatan Kandis Kabupaten Siak. *Jurnal Ibu dan Anak*, 6(2), 96–103.
- Yusuf al-Qaradawi. (1998). *Fiqh al-Usrah fi al-Islam*. Kairo: Maktabah Wahbah.