

Religious Counselors' Strategies in Encouraging Applications for the Legalization of Unregistered Marriages in Alla Sub-District, Enrekang Regency (2022–2024)

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Abstract

The phenomenon of unregistered marriages (*nikah siri*) is still found in Alla Sub-District, although it takes place discreetly and in limited numbers, thus requiring particular attention. This study aims to reveal the factors behind the occurrence of *nikah siri* in Alla Sub-District, Enrekang Regency, and to analyze the strategies employed by religious counselors in encouraging the legalization of marriages through *isbat nikah*. This research employed a descriptive method with a qualitative approach. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation involving officers from the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA), community leaders, religious figures, officials from the religious court, as well as couples who submitted *isbat nikah* applications in Alla Sub-District. The findings indicate that *nikah siri* persists due to administrative obstacles, economic burdens (particularly the traditional *uang panai* custom), and a limited understanding of the procedures and importance of official marriage registration. The strategies of religious counselors include persuasive, educational, and collaborative approaches, utilizing religious

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Introduction

Marriage in Islamic law is regarded as both a spiritual and social contract (*mitsaqan ghalidzan*) that establishes a sacred bond between a man and a woman. It is not merely an institution for biological fulfillment but a foundation for building a harmonious and enduring family based on tranquility (*sakinah*), affection (*mawaddah*), and mercy (*rahmah*). The Qur'an highlights marriage as one of God's signs:

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ مَوَدَّةً وَرَحْمَةً إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ

"And among His signs is that He created for you spouses from among yourselves, that you may find tranquility in them, and He placed between you affection and mercy. Surely in

this are signs for people who reflect” (Qur’an, Al-Rum 30:21; Ministry of Religious Affairs RI, 2021, p. 406). This verse emphasizes that marriage should promote spiritual peace, mutual respect, and shared responsibilities. Scholars argue that marriage embodies both the metaphysical purpose of human life and the legal obligation to protect the rights of spouses and children (Musyafah, 2020, p. 112).

Philosophically, marriage is designed to establish a legitimate family institution that contributes to human well-being in this world and salvation in the hereafter. Living within lawful marital bonds generates positive social and psychological impacts, providing stability and ensuring that relationships are governed by both divine and human law. The Indonesian legal system likewise positions marriage as a regulated institution, requiring both religious validity and state registration (Santoso et al., 2023, p. 27). The importance of registration lies in its ability to provide legal certainty, safeguard rights, and prevent disputes. The Compilation of Islamic Law (KHI, 2020, p. 2), in line with Law No. 22 of 1946 and Law No. 32 of 1945, requires all marriages to be registered by marriage registrars. Such provisions aim not only to preserve social order but also to ensure protection, particularly for women and children who are often the most vulnerable in cases of family conflict. Rofiq (2022, p. 91) further emphasizes that legal registration transforms a private religious contract into a recognized civil status, enabling spouses to access inheritance, custody, and social protection rights.

Despite these regulations, the phenomenon of *nikah siri* (unregistered marriage) continues to occur across Indonesia. *Nikah siri* refers to marriages conducted in accordance with religious law but without official state registration. They often occur due to economic constraints, cultural traditions, or lack of awareness regarding the importance of documentation. Alfin and Busyro (2017, pp. 61–78) argue that unregistered marriages disproportionately disadvantage women, leaving them vulnerable in cases of divorce, inheritance disputes, or child legitimacy. Without state recognition, such marriages lead to legal uncertainty, social stigma, and potential injustice. National data reinforce this problem: in 2022, Mahkamah Syariah Sinabang in Aceh recorded 78 cases of *nikah siri*, making it the most frequent case brought before the religious court that year (Jawapos, 2022). These figures reflect structural challenges in marriage registration, such as financial burdens, cultural practices like *uang panai* (traditional dowry in South Sulawesi), and limited dissemination of legal knowledge.

In Enrekang Regency, particularly in Alla Sub-District, the persistence of *nikah siri* illustrates how socio-cultural realities interact with state regulations. This region is characterized by strong Islamic values alongside deeply rooted traditions. While most of the population adheres to Islamic principles, practices such as high dowry demands discourage couples from registering their marriages. The Office of Religious Affairs (KUA), tasked with recording marriages, faces challenges because unregistered marriages are not reported and thus cannot be recorded. Religious courts provide a legal mechanism through *isbat nikah*, which validates unregistered marriages so they may be formally registered. Ginintu, Kasim, and Madjo (2024) emphasize the pivotal role of the KUA in promoting registration and cooperating with courts. However, the success of *isbat nikah* often depends on whether couples are willing to apply, which many avoid due to cost, stigma, or lack of awareness.

This condition highlights the essential role of religious counselors (*penyuluh agama*), who serve as mediators between the state, religious institutions, and communities. Their task goes beyond preaching to include guiding people toward lawful practices, such as encouraging couples to legalize marriages. As one religious counselor in Alla noted, cases of *nikah siri* are seldom reported directly to the KUA or village offices; they typically come to light only when couples apply for *isbat nikah* (Holidah Nuriah, personal interview, October 11, 2024). This indicates that proactive counseling and outreach are needed to uncover hidden cases and reduce legal uncertainty.

Existing literature has provided insights into institutional roles in addressing unregistered marriages. Ginintu et al. (2024) studied the KUA in Gorontalo, while Alfin and Busyro (2017) examined the socio-legal dimensions of *nikah siri*. However, limited attention has been paid to the specific strategies of religious counselors in local contexts. This gap represents the novelty of the present study: while prior research has centered on institutional and legal frameworks, this study highlights the adaptive, persuasive, and collaborative strategies of religious counselors in promoting *isbat nikah* within a culturally specific setting.

With this background, the present study aims to analyze the persistence of *nikah siri* in Alla Sub-District, Enrekang Regency, and to examine the strategies employed by religious counselors to encourage marriage legalization through *isbat nikah*. By addressing socio-cultural challenges alongside institutional roles, this research contributes to Islamic family law discourse in Indonesia and offers practical implications for policymakers, religious institutions, and community leaders.

Research Methods

This study employed a descriptive qualitative method, which was considered appropriate for portraying the strategies of religious counselors within the socio-cultural context of Alla Sub-District. The qualitative design was chosen because it allows researchers to explore participants' perspectives in depth, capturing meaning, process, and lived experiences rather than numerical measurements (Wekke et al., 2019). This approach enabled the study to present an authentic and holistic description of how religious counselors respond to the phenomenon of *nikah siri* and promote *isbat nikah*.

The research was conducted in Alla Sub-District, Enrekang Regency, South Sulawesi, specifically at the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA), Marriage and Hajj Guidance Section. This location was chosen because it serves as the institutional hub where religious counselors, community leaders, and couples interact in matters of marriage registration. Although the district is geographically dominated by highlands and rural settlements, the more relevant context lies in limited access to legal services, the persistence of cultural traditions such as *uang panai*, and gaps in public awareness about the importance of legal marriage documentation. These factors create fertile ground for the practice of unregistered marriages.

The research focused on two main aspects: (1) identifying the persistence of *nikah siri* in Alla Sub-District, and (2) analyzing the strategies employed by religious counselors to encourage couples to submit *isbat nikah* applications during 2022–2024. This dual emphasis enabled the study to examine both preventive efforts—raising awareness so that unregistered marriages are not normalized—and curative efforts—assisting couples to legalize their marriages through judicial mechanisms.

Data were obtained from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data came from fieldwork, including interviews with religious counselors at KUA, couples who had undergone *nikah siri*, KUA officials (head and marriage registration staff), religious court judges, and local religious and community leaders (Fadhallah, 2020). These informants provided first-hand insights into the prevalence of unregistered marriages and the strategies adopted to address them. Secondary data were drawn from statistical reports, official documents, academic journals, and other publications relevant to Islamic family law and marriage registration (Setiawan, Yunus, et al., 2018; Uswatun Khasanah, 2020). Data triangulation strengthened the credibility and validity of the findings.

Three complementary techniques were employed for data collection: observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted directly in the field to capture social behavior and patterns of interaction (Ardiansyah, Risnita, et al., 2023). Semi-structured interviews were used to elicit detailed information, balancing flexibility with

focus on key research questions. Documentation provided supporting evidence from written records, archives, and statistical reports (Mahmuddin, n.d.). Together, these techniques provided a multidimensional view of the phenomenon.

Data analysis followed the stages of reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing (Ahmad, 2021). Relevant data were selected, categorized, and simplified before being organized into narrative and tabular forms. Interpretation was then carried out to identify patterns and emerging themes. The final stage involved drawing conclusions through verification, ensuring the findings were grounded in the data. To enhance rigor, credibility checks such as member checking and peer debriefing were applied, reinforcing the trustworthiness of the results.

Results and Discussion

Phenomenon of Unregistered Marriage (Nikah Siri) in Alla Subdistrict, Enrekang Regency (2022–2024)

The findings of this study reveal that unregistered marriage (*nikah siri*) continues to be practiced within the community of Alla Subdistrict, Enrekang Regency, albeit in limited numbers and with relative discretion. Based on observations conducted from 2022 to 2024, cases of *nikah siri* were still discovered, though they were not openly carried out. This phenomenon demonstrates that despite ongoing government efforts to strengthen marriage registration systems, as mandated by the Marriage Law No. 1 of 1974 and its amendments, there remain socio-cultural and economic realities that sustain this practice.

Data collected from the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) of Alla Subdistrict indicates that between 2022 and 2024, several couples submitted applications for *isbat nikah* (judicial confirmation of marriage) to the Religious Court of Enrekang. The number, while not exceedingly high, reflects a steady pattern of unregistered marriages being brought forward for legalization. Interviews with KUA officials emphasized that the demand for *isbat nikah* is closely linked to administrative needs, such as obtaining a marriage certificate for children's birth registration, accessing health and education services, and fulfilling legal requirements for inheritance and guardianship.

From the field interviews, it was found that the practice of *nikah siri* arises from several underlying factors. First, there are administrative barriers, such as incomplete documentation or difficulties in obtaining parental consent. For instance, a KUA officer explained that "many young couples choose *nikah siri* because they do not have the required documents, including birth certificates or proof of identity, and they feel pressured to marry quickly due to social or family circumstances" (Interview, KUA Alla, June 2023). This illustrates that bureaucratic complexities often discourage couples from pursuing official marriage registration.

Second, economic constraints significantly contribute to the persistence of *nikah siri*. In Bugis-Makassar cultural traditions, particularly within Enrekang society, the custom of *uang panai* (bride price) remains a major component of marriage negotiations. The expectation of providing a high *uang panai* often delays formal marriages, especially among young men from lower-income families. A community leader noted that "for many, the requirement of *uang panai* becomes an obstacle. Couples who cannot afford it sometimes choose to proceed with *nikah siri* as a temporary solution" (Interview, Community Leader, Alla, August 2023). This demonstrates the cultural-economic intersection shaping marital practices in the area.

Third, there is a lack of awareness regarding the legal and religious implications of *nikah siri*. Although the majority of Alla's population are devout Muslims who recognize marriage as a sacred institution, not all fully comprehend the legal necessity of registering marriages with the state. Some believe that the presence of two witnesses and a guardian (*wali*) is sufficient to validate the union in the eyes of religion, without considering the consequences of non-registration. As one religious counselor observed, "people here often

think that as long as the marriage is religiously valid, registration is optional. They only come to realize its importance when administrative problems arise later” (Interview, Religious Counselor, Alla, December 2023).

The study also found that unregistered marriages often involve vulnerable groups, such as women who enter into second marriages without the consent of the first wife, or underage couples seeking to avoid the minimum marriage age requirement stipulated in Indonesian law. The lack of registration in such cases exacerbates the vulnerability of women and children, leaving them without legal protection in matters of divorce, inheritance, or custody. Documentation from the Enrekang Religious Court confirms that petitions for *isbat nikah* frequently include requests related to child legitimacy and guardianship (Religious Court Archive, 2022–2024).

Furthermore, socio-cultural dynamics in Alla Subdistrict reinforce the practice. With a population of approximately 25,282 people (Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Enrekang, 2024), the community retains strong adherence to local customs and traditions. Most residents work in the agricultural sector, with 65% of the population engaged in farming activities. This rural socioeconomic profile shapes the perspectives of marriage, where traditional practices often outweigh legal formalities. As a result, unregistered marriages are not always perceived as problematic until specific legal or administrative needs emerge.

The phenomenon of *nikah siri* in Alla cannot be detached from its geographical and cultural context. The subdistrict’s hilly terrain and relatively limited access to urban facilities contribute to slower dissemination of legal knowledge. Religious and cultural leaders still hold significant influence in guiding community practices. In this sense, the persistence of unregistered marriages reflects a negotiation between religious norms, cultural customs, and state law. It also underscores the crucial role of religious counselors (*penyuluh agama*) as mediators who bridge these normative frameworks.

In summary, the results indicate that while *nikah siri* is not widespread in Alla, its continued occurrence is shaped by a combination of administrative difficulties, economic burdens linked to traditional customs, and limited awareness of legal requirements. The phenomenon demonstrates the intersection of religion, culture, economy, and law in rural Enrekang society. These findings provide the basis for analyzing the strategies implemented by religious counselors to encourage couples to pursue *isbat nikah*, which will be elaborated in the discussion section.

Strategies of Religious Counselors to Encourage the Filing of *Isbat Nikah Siri* in Alla Sub-District, Enrekang Regency (2022–2024)

A. Contributing Factors to *Nikah Siri*

The persistence of *nikah siri* in Alla Sub-district, Enrekang Regency, cannot be separated from a complex interplay of structural, cultural, economic, and educational factors that shape local perceptions of marriage and legality. Field findings reveal that despite continuous efforts by the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA), the judiciary, and religious counselors, the phenomenon remains embedded in the everyday life of the community. Although *nikah siri* is not openly practiced and occurs in relatively small numbers, it still represents a deeply rooted social reality that reflects the coexistence of formal legal norms and traditional religious practices (Interview with Fatmawati, May 5, 2025). This persistence indicates that state regulations alone are insufficient to modify entrenched cultural habits without parallel efforts in education, awareness, and social engagement.

From a legal-administrative perspective, the lack of complete civil documentation continues to pose one of the most tangible barriers to official marriage registration. Many couples are unable to fulfill the administrative requirements at the KUA, such as presenting

valid identity cards, family registration cards, or divorce certificates for widows and widowers. In rural contexts like Alla—characterized by limited access to administrative offices, low digital literacy, and geographic isolation—these bureaucratic processes can become daunting and time-consuming. Consequently, couples often perceive *nikah siri* as a practical alternative that circumvents paperwork and costs. Religious counselors frequently report that such couples do not necessarily reject state law, but rather see *nikah siri* as a temporary solution while awaiting document completion. This aligns with earlier studies demonstrating that weak legal literacy in rural communities correlates with higher rates of unregistered marriages, revealing a gap between legal awareness and daily practice (Interview with Nur Alam Hasan, May 5, 2025).

The economic dimension further exacerbates the persistence of *nikah siri*. The people of Enrekang uphold strong customary traditions, including the well-known practice of *uang panai* (bride-price), which symbolizes family honor and social standing. However, this custom often entails a substantial financial burden for young men, especially those with modest income or unstable employment. For many, the expectation to accumulate a large *uang panai* delays marriage indefinitely. In response, some couples opt for *nikah siri* as a compromise that allows them to fulfill their religious obligations and avoid accusations of improper relationships. Several respondents admitted that they chose to marry secretly rather than postpone marriage due to economic hardship (Interview with Nusran, May 7, 2025). While this decision satisfies cultural and religious norms in the short term, it creates long-term vulnerabilities, particularly for women and children who are left without formal legal protections in cases of divorce, inheritance disputes, or child custody. Religious counselors identified this economic-cultural tension as one of the most persistent challenges, as it involves not only personal piety but also the collective pride of families and communities.

Equally influential are the cultural and social expectations that shape attitudes toward marriage. In Enrekang society, family reputation, social harmony, and adherence to customary norms are highly valued. A woman who remains unmarried beyond a socially accepted age risks being perceived as a burden or source of shame for her family. To avoid this stigma, families may agree to conduct *nikah siri* quietly, sometimes with the assistance of religious leaders, but without involving the state registrar. This practice reflects a communal negotiation between moral expectations and bureaucratic constraints. Religious counselors interviewed during the study emphasized that dealing with such culturally sensitive situations requires empathy and cultural fluency. They cannot simply impose legal directives but must engage in persuasive and dialogical communication that respects local values (Interview with Fatmawati, May 5, 2025). Overly formal or legalistic interventions are often counterproductive, as they may be interpreted as undermining family honor or exposing private matters to public scrutiny.

Educational factors also play a decisive role in sustaining the practice of *nikah siri*. Levels of legal and religious literacy among villagers remain relatively low, with many residents believing that a marriage fulfilling religious requirements alone is fully valid in all respects. This perception is deeply rooted in the traditional Islamic understanding that emphasizes the fulfillment of *rukun* and *syarat nikah* as sufficient indicators of validity. Consequently, marriage registration is often viewed as a mere administrative formality rather than a crucial legal necessity. This misperception is reinforced by the lack of accessible information about the legal consequences of unregistered marriage, including the absence of civil rights for wives and children. Religious counselors noted that while communities are receptive to religious sermons (*pengajian*), discussions of marriage law and state regulations are often considered secondary to moral or theological teachings. Thus, the counselors' role extends beyond religious guidance to encompass civic education, helping the public understand that compliance with state law is not contradictory to religious faith but complementary to it.

In many cases, *nikah siri* persists not because the community deliberately resists legal norms, but because of limited institutional outreach and the historical separation between religious and administrative domains. While the KUA functions as the central institution responsible for marriage registration, its reach is often constrained by limited personnel, transportation challenges, and uneven dissemination of information. Furthermore, public awareness programs about *isbat nikah* procedures are still concentrated in urban centers, leaving rural communities like Alla relatively underserved. This condition reinforces the perception that state-sanctioned marriage registration is a distant, urban-centric process inaccessible to ordinary villagers.

Therefore, the persistence of *nikah siri* in Alla Sub-district cannot be attributed to a single cause. It represents the convergence of economic hardship, bureaucratic obstacles, enduring cultural norms, and gaps in legal-religious understanding. The practice reflects a delicate balance between moral intention and institutional limitation, where individuals act according to their conscience within the boundaries of what is socially and economically feasible. For this reason, addressing *nikah siri* requires more than administrative enforcement—it demands an integrative approach that combines religious counseling, legal facilitation, and socio-cultural engagement. Religious counselors, positioned between state institutions and local communities, play a pivotal role as mediators who bridge these frameworks. Their task is not merely to convey legal obligations but to translate them into culturally resonant language that encourages voluntary compliance and nurtures long-term behavioral change.

B. Implications of Nikah Siri for the Community

The phenomenon of *nikah siri* has far-reaching implications for individuals, families, and the broader community in Alla Sub-district. Although such marriages may appear to resolve immediate cultural or economic pressures, they often create long-term social, legal, and psychological consequences.

One of the most direct impacts is on women's legal status. Without a marriage certificate, wives in *nikah siri* unions are unable to claim their rights in cases of divorce, inheritance, or domestic disputes. This leaves women in vulnerable positions, often dependent entirely on the goodwill of their husbands or extended families. Religious counselors frequently observe cases where women are abandoned or divorced verbally, with no recourse to legal protection (Interview with Fatmawati, May 5, 2025). This dynamic contradicts national goals of gender equality and women's empowerment.

Children born from *nikah siri* unions face even greater challenges. Although recent legal reforms in Indonesia have expanded the recognition of children born out of unregistered marriages, bureaucratic hurdles remain significant. Without a registered marriage, obtaining a birth certificate listing the father's name becomes difficult, thereby limiting children's access to education, health care, and inheritance rights. In several interviews, community leaders expressed concern that such children may grow up with stigma or reduced opportunities compared to their peers (Interview with Usman Rasid, May 21, 2025).

At the societal level, *nikah siri* undermines the integrity of the state's civil registration system. When marriages are not officially recorded, demographic data becomes unreliable, complicating governance and social planning. Local officials such as village heads acknowledged that unregistered marriages hinder population administration, making it difficult to track household data, distribute welfare benefits, and enforce legal responsibilities (Interview with Hardianto, May 19, 2025).

The phenomenon also perpetuates cycles of poverty and social inequality. Families formed through *nikah siri* often struggle with limited access to state services, leading to intergenerational disadvantages. This has been highlighted in community programs such as

Posyandu Remaja, which aim to educate young people on the risks of early and unregistered marriages (Interview with Rusman Rasid, May 21, 2025).

From a broader perspective, *nikah siri* weakens public trust in the legal system. When communities perceive that state law is optional or secondary to religious practice, the legitimacy of legal institutions may erode. Religious counselors in Alla thus frame *isbat nikah* not merely as a bureaucratic necessity, but as a means to strengthen societal commitment to law and justice.

C. Strategies of Religious Counselors to Encourage *Isbat Nikah Siri*

Given the complexity of factors sustaining *nikah siri*, religious counselors in Alla employ a multi-dimensional strategy to promote *isbat nikah*. Their role extends beyond preaching to encompass advocacy, mediation, education, and collaboration with other stakeholders.

1. Persuasive and Cultural Approaches

Religious counselors emphasize a personal and empathetic method in addressing couples who have undergone *nikah siri*. They use informal visits, private conversations, and participation in community events to build trust. Counselors avoid direct confrontation, instead embedding messages about legal marriage within broader discussions of family well-being, religious values, and child protection. For instance, Fatmawati, a counselor in Alla, highlighted that face-to-face approaches often yield better results, as individuals feel more comfortable sharing their concerns privately rather than in public forums (Interview with Fatmawati, May 5, 2025).

Cultural sensitivity also plays a role. Counselors acknowledge the importance of family honor and collaborate with traditional leaders when necessary. By respecting local customs while gently introducing legal perspectives, they prevent resistance and foster acceptance. This strategy aligns with the principle of *dakwah bil hikmah*—preaching with wisdom—which adapts the message to the audience's context.

2. Advocacy Strategies

Religious counselors also serve as advocates, directly assisting couples in navigating bureaucratic procedures. They identify couples practicing *nikah siri*, verify the religious validity of their marriage, and guide them toward appropriate solutions. If the marriage is valid religiously but unregistered, they encourage couples to file for *isbat nikah* at the Religious Court. In some cases, counselors accompany couples to the KUA or court to provide psychological support (Interview with Hardianto, May 19, 2025).

The advocacy role also includes mediating between families and local officials. Counselors ensure that couples understand the procedural steps and are not discouraged by administrative complexities. Nusran, a subdistrict official, confirmed that counselors frequently use wedding ceremonies and administrative processes as opportunities to emphasize the importance of official registration (Interview with Nusran, May 7, 2025).

3. Collaborative Approaches

Counselors do not work in isolation; they build networks with village heads, religious leaders, and government institutions. Village officials, such as Usman Rasid, reported active involvement in urging couples to undertake *isbat nikah* for smoother administrative processes (Interview with Usman Rasid, May 21, 2025). Similarly, *majlis taklim* forums serve as platforms where religious counselors and community leaders jointly raise awareness about the risks of *nikah siri* (Interview with Ahmad Sain, May 20, 2025).

This collaborative framework extends to youth education. Programs like *Posyandu Remaja* are used to raise awareness about the legal age of marriage and the importance of registration (Interview with Rusman Rasid, May 21, 2025). Such partnerships demonstrate

that addressing *nikah siri* requires collective action across religious, administrative, and educational domains.

4. Use of Social Media

Recognizing the growing role of digital communication, counselors in Alla utilize platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook to disseminate information. Social media allows messages to reach individuals who may not attend physical gatherings, thereby broadening outreach (Interview with Fatmawati, May 5, 2025). Posts often include reminders about the risks of unregistered marriage, step-by-step guides for *isbat nikah*, and success stories of couples who completed the process.

This digital strategy not only amplifies reach but also fosters transparency. Documentation of *isbat nikah* activities shared online serves as evidence of progress and encourages others to follow suit. By adapting traditional counseling methods to modern platforms, religious counselors ensure that their message resonates with younger, tech-savvy audiences.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the persistence of *nikah siri* in Alla Subdistrict, Enrekang Regency, is not merely a matter of personal choice but rather the outcome of intertwined socio-cultural, economic, and administrative factors. While the practice continues to exist discreetly, religious counselors have played a pivotal role in fostering legal awareness and promoting the formalization of marriage through *isbat nikah*. Their strategies—ranging from persuasive dialogue, religious and civic education, to collaborative initiatives with local leaders and state institutions—have proven to be adaptive and context-specific, successfully raising public understanding of marriage registration and its long-term benefits. However, these strategies have not yet entirely reduced the prevalence of *nikah siri*, as hidden cases remain undetected and certain cultural or economic constraints persist. The findings highlight the importance of strengthening cross-sectoral collaboration, expanding legal literacy, and integrating socio-economic support to ensure that the right to a legally recognized marriage can be fully realized. Future research and policy initiatives should therefore focus on sustainable interventions that address the structural causes of *nikah siri* while empowering religious counselors as key agents of change in advancing family law compliance.

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