

Pre-Marital Counseling as Preparation for Emotional and Spiritual Readiness for Students of Subulussalam Islamic Boarding School, Plosokandang Village, Kedungwaru District, Tulungagung Regency

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Abstract

Marriage is a sacred institution that requires emotional and spiritual readiness for individuals who are about to enter family life. Santri, as the younger generation in the pesantren environment, generally possess normative knowledge of fiqh munakahat (Islamic marital jurisprudence), yet often lack adequate psychological and spiritual preparedness. This community service activity aimed to enhance the emotional and spiritual readiness of santri at Subulussalam Islamic Boarding School through premarital counseling based on a developmental approach. The program was implemented through needs assessment, interactive counseling sessions, communication skills training, conflict resolution simulations, and spiritual values mentoring. The results of the activity indicate a significant improvement in the santri's knowledge, attitudes, and skills related to marital dynamics. The santri gained a better understanding of the importance of emotional regulation, spousal communication, family responsibility, and the spiritual values of sakinah, mawaddah, and rahmah. Collaboration between the pesantren and UIN SATU Tulungagung also resulted in a comprehensive premarital module that can be utilized as a sustainable program. This activity demonstrates that premarital counseling grounded in psychological, religious, and practical approaches is highly effective in preparing santri to face married life in a mature and responsible manner.

Keywords: premarital counseling, emotional readiness, spiritual readiness, santri, Islamic boarding school

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a fundamental institution in human life that functions not only as a social bond but also as a spiritual commitment within Islamic teachings. Emotional and spiritual readiness are crucial aspects that determine the quality of long-term marital relationships. In the context of santri, their understanding of fiqh munakahat is generally strong; however, this knowledge often does not correspond with adequate psychological readiness to enter married life.

This phenomenon is also evident at Subulussalam Islamic Boarding School, where a number of santri show a strong interest in marriage after graduation but lack a comprehensive understanding of the emotional dynamics and spousal responsibilities involved. Preliminary observations indicate that santri tend to perceive marriage primarily as an administrative process or an act of worship, without fully recognizing the psychological complexities that may arise.

Moreover, the rapid development of digital technology has shaped santri's idealistic perceptions of marriage. Access to unverified information through social media frequently generates unrealistic

expectations about married life, which can hinder their emotional and spiritual readiness to face marital realities.

The pesantren caregivers have noted several cases of marital conflict experienced by pesantren alumni, particularly during the early years of marriage. These problems are generally caused by a lack of emotional maturity, weak communication skills, and limited conflict management abilities. This condition highlights the urgency of more comprehensive premarital guidance.

Spiritual readiness is another aspect that requires special attention. Although santri receive intensive religious education, not all are able to internalize these values within the context of real family life. Spirituality must be translated into ethical conduct, moral commitment, and the capacity to cope with the trials of married life.

Based on these various phenomena, premarital counseling has become an urgent necessity to enhance the emotional and spiritual readiness of santri. Through a holistic approach that integrates Islamic jurisprudence, psychology, and spiritual values, this program is designed to equip santri with the understanding and skills required for a healthy and responsible married life.

This community service program provides several significant contributions, both theoretically and practically, particularly in strengthening the premarital readiness of santri within the pesantren context. It expands the prevailing paradigm of premarital education in Islamic boarding schools, which has traditionally emphasized the normative aspects of fiqh munakahat, by complementing them with applicable psychological and spiritual approaches. Consequently, santri are not only able to understand marital law in a textual manner, but also develop the emotional skills and spiritual awareness required for sustaining family life.

The principal novelty of this community service initiative lies in its holistic integration of fiqh munakahat, developmental psychology, and spiritual formation within a pesantren-based premarital counseling model. In contrast to conventional premarital programs that are often ceremonial or oriented toward one-way material delivery, this program is designed using developmental and experiential learning approaches that emphasize active santri engagement through self-reflection, simulations, and real-case discussions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The basic concept of this community service program is grounded in the understanding that marriage is a sacred institution that requires not only physical and material preparedness but also emotional and spiritual readiness. Emotional readiness includes an individual's ability to manage emotions, understand oneself, communicate effectively, and resolve conflicts in a mature manner. Psychological experts explain that emotional maturity is closely related to long-term relationship stability and family well-being (Bowen, M., 2019). In the context of santri in Islamic boarding schools, emotional readiness is a crucial aspect because they grow up in a structured and religious environment, yet do not necessarily have sufficient interpersonal experience to face the dynamics of partnered life.

Spiritual readiness constitutes an equally important second aspect, as family life in Islam is rooted in the values of piety, moral conduct, and worship. Spirituality serves as the foundation for decision-making, self-control, and interpreting conflict as part of the trials of married life. According to religious literature, spiritual strength enables couples to build a sakinah family based on mawaddah and rahmah (Shihab, M. Q., 2018). In the context of santri, they may possess religious knowledge, but have not necessarily internalized these spiritual values as practical preparation for real marital life.

Premarital counseling in this community service program is designed to integrate these psychological and spiritual aspects so that santri gain a comprehensive understanding of readiness for

family life. The counseling program does not merely provide theoretical material, but also facilitates self-reflection, communication simulations, and discussions on roles and responsibilities within the family. Research findings indicate that premarital counseling can significantly enhance the mental and spiritual readiness of prospective couples, including within the context of Islamic boarding school education (Larson, J. H., 2019). Therefore, counseling is an effective method to bridge the needs of santri who are entering adulthood.

Previous studies indicate that conventional premarital counseling programs, particularly those implemented by religious institutions, primarily emphasize the normative and legal dimensions of marriage, including marital obligations and procedural requirements. Although these approaches strengthen doctrinal understanding, they often rely on one-way instructional methods and provide limited opportunities for developing emotional regulation, communication skills, and conflict management abilities (Larson, 2019).

In contrast, best practices in premarital education emphasize the integration of psychological competencies and experiential learning approaches, which have been shown to enhance relational readiness and marital resilience (Bowen, 2019). While some Islamic premarital programs attempt to incorporate religious values with psychological insights, they frequently remain text-oriented and insufficiently contextualized to the lived experiences of young adults in pesantren environments (Safitri & Hidayat, 2020).

The premarital counseling model applied in this community service program addresses these limitations by holistically integrating fiqh munakahat, developmental psychology, and spiritual formation within a pesantren-based framework. Through experiential learning methods such as self reflection, simulations, and real-case discussions this model aligns with contemporary best practices while remaining grounded in Islamic values, thereby bridging the gap between normative religious instruction and practical premarital readiness.

The normative foundation of this community service program is based on Fiqh Munakahat, which regulates marriage procedures, the rights and obligations of husband and wife, relationship ethics, and principles for building a harmonious family. This body of jurisprudence contains teachings on marriage as an act of worship, the importance of moral readiness, and the obligation to uphold family trust (amanah). Scholars emphasize that marriage requires inner preparedness and the ability to manage responsibilities in accordance with Islamic law (Al-Jaziri, A., 2010). Consequently, this theoretical foundation is essential in premarital counseling so that santri not only understand juridical aspects, but also internalize the moral values embedded within them.

Thus, the conceptual framework of this community service program is constructed through the integration of emotional readiness, spiritual readiness, counseling methods, and the normative foundation of Islamic jurisprudence. These four components form a unified approach aimed at enhancing the capacity of santri at Subulussalam Islamic Boarding School to enter married life in a more mature, responsible, and Islamically grounded manner. This integration is expected to foster a holistic understanding that marriage is not merely a contractual bond, but a lifelong responsibility requiring balance between emotional development, spiritual growth, and adherence to Islamic principles (Abdullah, M., 2020).

METHOD

This community service research employed a developmental approach with a community-based capacity-building design. The methodology included a needs assessment of the santri, interactive counseling sessions, simulations of communication and conflict resolution, role-playing activities,

structured reflection, small-group mentoring, and pre-post test evaluations. Data were collected through observation, questionnaires, interviews, and documentation. Changes in participants' knowledge, attitudes, and skills were evaluated using a pre-test and post-test design with structured instruments developed based on the program objectives and relevant literature on premarital counseling, emotional readiness, and fiqh munakahat. Knowledge was measured through multiple-choice items, attitudes were assessed using Likert-scale questionnaires, and skills were evaluated through observational checklists applied during simulations and role-play activities. Prior to implementation, the instruments were reviewed and validated by experts in Islamic counseling, developmental psychology, and fiqh munakahat to ensure content relevance and contextual suitability. The pre- and post-test results were analyzed descriptively to identify changes in participants' premarital readiness following the intervention. Data analysis was conducted using a descriptive qualitative approach to assess changes in the santri's knowledge, attitudes, and skills related to emotional and spiritual readiness.

RESULT

The implementation of activities during the pre-service stage began with internal coordination among the team from UIN SATU Tulungagung. This initial meeting was conducted to discuss program design, task distribution, timeline determination, and the development of initial assessment instruments. The service team consisted of lecturers with expertise in Islamic counseling guidance, fiqh munakahat, and character education. At this stage, the team also conducted a literature review to ensure that the program design aligned with the actual needs of the santri, particularly regarding emotional and spiritual readiness for marital life. The results of the team discussions produced a draft proposal, which then served as the basis for external coordination with the Islamic boarding school.

The next stage involved formal coordination with the leadership of Subulussalam Islamic Boarding School. This coordination took the form of an official audience to present the objectives, benefits, and urgency of the premarital counseling program to be implemented. The pesantren leadership welcomed the initiative, as no previous program had specifically focused on premarital preparation for final-year santri. The discussion revealed that caregivers frequently encountered cases of santri marrying at a young age without adequate mental and spiritual preparation. This condition led to several issues, such as limited understanding of family responsibilities, emotional instability, and weak communication skills within marriage. This information reinforced the importance and relevance of the community service program.

In addition to the formal audience, the service team conducted an environmental survey of the pesantren to gain insight into the learning environment, daily routines of the santri, and institutional culture related to the mentoring of male and female santri. The survey included observations of ngaji kitab activities, ongoing fiqh munakahat studies, interactions between santri and caregivers, and patterns of religious habituation. The observations indicated that although fiqh munakahat had been introduced through classical texts, its application in practical life contexts had not been optimally internalized. This finding strengthened the conclusion that counseling materials needed to be delivered in an interactive and practical format rather than purely theoretical.

The pre-service stage also included a needs assessment of the santri. This activity was carried out through the distribution of initial questionnaires designed to measure the santri's level of knowledge about marriage, emotional readiness, and understanding of spiritual responsibilities in family life. The results showed that most santri understood marriage primarily from the perspective of Islamic legal rulings, but lacked understanding of psychological aspects such as emotional regulation, conflict management, and interpersonal communication between spouses. From a

spiritual perspective, santri reported that they had never received specific guidance on etiquette and moral conduct in married life. These data further strengthened the direction of the program material design.

To support the assessment process, the team also conducted in-depth interviews with caregivers, ustaz, and dormitory supervisors. These interviews aimed to obtain a more detailed picture of the characteristics of final-year santri, their social dynamics, and instances of early marriage within the pesantren environment. The interviews revealed that several santri married after graduation, and some faced challenges in adapting to marital roles due to insufficient emotional and spiritual readiness. This information served as an important empirical foundation for developing the premarital module.

At the pre-service stage, the team proceeded with the development of the counseling module. The module contained practical fiqh munakahat materials, emotional management strategies, effective communication skills, conflict resolution techniques, and the cultivation of spiritual values for building a sakinhah family. The module was developed based on the results of the previous assessments to ensure alignment with the santri's needs. It also incorporated Qur'anic verses and hadith related to marital ethics and moral values emphasized within the pesantren tradition. The module was designed in an interactive format, incorporating case studies, simulations, and self-reflection activities.

After completion, the module underwent validation with expert lecturers in premarital counseling, adolescent developmental psychology, and fiqh munakahat at UIN SATU Tulungagung. This validation aimed to ensure that all module content was scientifically relevant, compliant with Islamic law, and contextualized to pesantren life. The experts provided several recommendations, such as the inclusion of real-life case examples and the integration of Islamic psychology approaches. These inputs were fully accommodated before the module was finalized.

The subsequent pre-service stage involved scheduling the implementation of the program through mutual agreement between the service team and the pesantren authorities. The schedule was arranged by considering pesantren activities such as ngaji, formal schooling, and evening routines. Scheduling was crucial to ensure that the program did not disrupt the santri's daily activities while still receiving optimal attention. It was agreed that the activities would be conducted on specific days outside the main study hours.

The team also prepared pre-program evaluation instruments in the form of a pre-test to be administered to santri prior to the implementation of activities. The pre-test covered aspects of knowledge, attitudes, and emotional and spiritual readiness. Its purpose was to measure the baseline competencies of santri so that changes after the counseling program could be objectively analyzed. The instruments included multiple-choice questionnaires, attitude scales, and several reflective questions.

The pre-service stage concluded with technical and administrative preparations, including assignment letters for lecturers, activity permits, preparation of teaching aids, presentation media design, and documentation planning. The team also ensured that the pesantren's facilities supported the implementation of the program, such as classrooms, LCD projectors, sound systems, and seating arrangements. Overall, the results of the pre-service stage indicated that preparations were conducted in a thorough and systematic manner, enabling the program to proceed smoothly into the core implementation phase.

Table: Pre-Service Stages of the Premarital Counseling Program Subulussalam Islamic Boarding School × UIN SATU Tulungagung

Stage	Activity Description	Output / Results
1. Internal Coordination of the UIN SATU Tulungagung Team	Planning meetings, task allocation, timeline development, preparation of initial assessment instruments, and literature review on premarital counseling, Islamic counseling, and <i>fiqh munakahat</i> .	Draft activity proposal and initial assessment design.
2. Audience with the Leadership of Subulussalam Islamic Boarding School	Presentation of program objectives, urgency, benefits, and confirmation of pesantren readiness; identification of cases of young santri marriages without emotional-spiritual preparation.	Approval of program implementation and adjustment of program direction based on pesantren conditions.
3. Pesantren Environmental Survey	Observation of santri daily activities, pesantren culture, classical text learning, and internalization of <i>fiqh munakahat</i> .	Context mapping of the pesantren and identification of gaps between theoretical understanding and practical marital life.
4. Santri Needs Assessment	Distribution of questionnaires to measure premarital knowledge, emotional readiness, and spiritual readiness of final-year santri.	Baseline data on santri needs in emotional, spiritual, and family-knowledge aspects.
5. Interviews with Caregivers & <i>Ustadz</i>	In-depth interviews on santri characteristics, social behavior, experiences of early marriage, and mentoring challenges.	Qualitative data to inform module development and counseling approaches.
6. Development of the Premarital Counseling Module	Preparation of applied <i>fiqh</i> materials, emotion management, couple communication, conflict management, and <i>sakinah</i> family spiritual values; interactive formats (case studies, simulations, reflection).	A comprehensive counseling module aligned with santri needs.
7. Expert Validation of the Module	Consultation with experts in counseling, adolescent psychology, and <i>fiqh munakahat</i> to ensure relevance and Islamically validated module. contextual suitability.	Scientifically and and Islamically validated module.
8. Scheduling of Program Implementation	Alignment of schedules with pesantren activities (kitab study, school schedule that does not disrupt activities, evening routines).	Official counseling activities.
9. Development of Pre-test Instruments	Design of baseline tests to measure knowledge, attitudes, emotional readiness, and spiritual readiness of participants.	Pre-test instruments ready for use at program onset.

Stage	Activity Description	Output / Results
10. Technical and Administrative Preparation	Preparation of assignment letters, permits, teaching aids, presentation media, and facilities check (LCD, classrooms, sound system).	All technical and administrative requirements ready for implementation.

DISCUSSION

The mentoring activities at Subulussalam Islamic Boarding School demonstrated significant progress in santri's understanding of the importance of premarital readiness, particularly in the emotional and spiritual dimensions. At the beginning of the mentoring process, santri tended to understand marriage solely within a normative religious framework, such as the pillars, requirements, and legal rulings of munakahat. However, through in-depth discussions and interactive dialogue, santri gradually came to understand that marriage is also a psychosocial institution that requires emotional maturity, communication skills, spiritual resilience, and awareness of long-term responsibilities.

The mentoring program successfully enhanced santri's self-awareness skills through self-reflection activities. Santri were asked to write about their emotional experiences and identify factors influencing emotional stability, such as communication patterns, environmental pressures, and family expectations. Evaluation results indicated improved understanding of emotional regulation concepts and increased ability to manage stress. This was reflected in santri's greater capacity to identify primary emotions such as anger, anxiety, and fear, and to express them in more adaptive ways.

Spiritual mentoring was conducted through the integration of sakinah–mawaddah–rahmah values with daily worship practices and moral conduct. These activities were carried out through thematic halaqah, the reading of classical texts, and discussions on family ethics. Santri were encouraged to analyze cases of household conflict and seek solutions based on Islamic spiritual principles. The results showed a shift in santri's perspectives, recognizing that spirituality is not limited to ritual worship but also encompasses moral commitment, patience, trustworthiness (amanah), and maturity in fulfilling family roles.

In addition to increased understanding, there was also significant development in interpersonal skills. Through simulations of husband–wife communication, santri were able to practice active listening, assertive communication, and conflict resolution. In practice, santri who previously struggled to express opinions began to show greater confidence in conveying their thoughts using constructive language. This change indicates that the mentoring process enhanced both self-confidence and relational communication skills.

The mentoring program also strengthened understanding of munakahat law. Santri were invited to study contemporary issues such as spousal roles, financial obligations, gender equity, and the dynamics of modern family relationships. Santri who previously understood fiqh texts only literally began to demonstrate contextual analysis. They were able to connect fiqh principles with modern life realities, including financial decision-making, division of domestic roles, and reproductive rights within Islam.

In terms of attitudinal change, the mentoring had a positive impact on how santri perceived the seriousness of marriage. Prior to the program, some santri viewed marriage as a natural step toward adulthood without sufficient consideration of emotional and social responsibilities. After participating in the mentoring series, santri demonstrated a new awareness that marriage requires holistic readiness encompassing mental, spiritual, financial, and social aspects. This attitudinal change was evident from in-depth interviews showing increased motivation among santri to prepare themselves more thoroughly.

The mentoring activities also succeeded in fostering a culture of dialogue within the pesantren environment. Group discussions encouraged santri to be more open about personal experiences, particularly regarding environmental pressures, future concerns, and family expectations related to marriage. With the creation of a safe space for sharing, santri became more capable of identifying psychological issues that they may not have previously recognized. This dialogical culture is expected to continue developing as part of character education in the pesantren.

Overall, the outcomes of the mentoring program indicated significant improvement across three main aspects: knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Santri experienced not only increased cognitive capacity regarding marriage law and family dynamics, but also improved social skills and a more mature mindset. Thus, the mentoring program at Subulussalam Islamic Boarding School can be considered effective in building comprehensive and sustainable premarital readiness (continuous development), in line with the principles of a developmental approach.

The implementation of the community service program by the UIN SATU Tulungagung team began with a needs assessment through observation, interviews with pesantren caregivers, and the distribution of questionnaires to santri. This process revealed limited emotional literacy, insufficiently deep spiritual understanding, and minimal interpersonal communication skills among santri. These findings formed the basis for developing an applicative and contextual premarital counseling module tailored to the conditions of pesantren santri.

One of UIN SATU's major contributions was the preparation and delivery of materials grounded in modern theories of family psychology and Islamic education. Lecturers and students involved in the program provided training on emotional regulation, effective spousal communication, family conflict dynamics, and household spirituality. These materials were delivered using experiential learning methods, enabling santri not only to understand concepts but also to practice them directly.

In addition to delivering instructional content, the service team facilitated focus group discussions (FGDs) among santri. These activities were designed to explore santri's perceptions of marriage and to identify emotional barriers they faced. Through the FGDs, several maladaptive thinking patterns were identified, such as the belief that marriage serves as a solution to personal problems or as an escape from environmental pressure. Facilitators then clarified these misconceptions and provided evidence-based insights into the importance of multidimensional readiness.

The UIN SATU team also conducted capacity-building activities for pesantren administrators as part of the program's sustainability strategy. Administrators received training in santri mentoring techniques, the development of internal premarital guidance modules, and strategies for monitoring

santri's emotional development. The goal was to ensure that the mentoring program would not end with the community service activity alone, but could continue as a regular pesantren program.

Collaboration between UIN SATU students and santri during premarital counseling simulations produced significant outcomes. University students acted as young facilitators who accompanied santri in spousal communication exercises, conflict resolution simulations, and self-regulation training. This interaction resulted in effective skill transfer: students enhanced their mentoring competencies, while santri gained direct experience in handling situations likely to arise in married life.

The spiritual training provided by the UIN SATU team also yielded positive impacts. Topics such as tazkiyatun nafs, marital ethics, spousal responsibilities, and rahmah values were delivered using a reflective approach. Santri were encouraged to contemplate Qur'anic verses and hadith related to marriage and connect them to their personal emotional conditions. As a result, santri's spirituality became more contextual and was no longer limited to ritual worship alone.

Evaluation of the program implementation indicated a significant improvement in participants' understanding, attitudes, and skills. Increased understanding was reflected in pre-test and post-test results, which showed a 27% increase in premarital literacy scores. Santri's attitudes became more realistic and mature in interpreting marriage, while communication skills improved through practical exercises conducted during mentoring sessions.

Overall, the implementation of the community service program by UIN SATU Tulungagung functioned as a catalyst for strengthening pesantren capacity through the integration of psychology, Islamic education, and munakahat law. This academic-practical synergy made the program more meaningful and generated long-term impact. With the availability of modules, administrator training, and enhanced santri capacity, the program serves as an initial foundation for establishing a sustainable pesantren-based premarital counseling system.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of premarital counseling at Subulussalam Islamic Boarding School indicates that santri require strengthened emotional and spiritual readiness to face married life. Although their religious knowledge is relatively sound, they often lack sufficient awareness of psychological dynamics and the challenges of family life. Through counseling sessions, mentoring, and case simulations, there was a significant improvement in emotional regulation skills, understanding of marital concepts, and the reinforcement of spiritual values relevant to family life.

The experiential-based counseling model proved to be effective in the pesantren context. Guided discussions, role-play activities, and personal consultations enabled santri to comprehend the realities of marriage in a more concrete manner. The integration of fiqh munakahat perspectives with family psychology made the counseling materials more comprehensive and applicable. The positive impact of the program was reflected in increased santri confidence, improved ability to identify potential conflicts, and enhanced skills in formulating resolution strategies based on healthy communication, empathy, and spiritual values.

Furthermore, the involvement of UIN SATU Tulungagung through a developmental approach strengthened the overall effectiveness of the program. The team of lecturers and students not only

delivered instructional content but also established a sustainable learning ecosystem through the development of modules, assessment instruments, and mentoring guidelines. This collaboration bridged academic theory with the realities of pesantren life, resulting in enhanced institutional capacity for premarital education, long-term impact on family resilience, and new opportunities for further research in the fields of family education and pesantren community empowerment.

This program has practical implications for the sustainability of premarital education in pesantren contexts. The premarital counseling module can be institutionalized as part of regular santri mentoring activities, while the involvement of pesantren caregivers enables program continuity without reliance on external facilitators. The experiential learning approach allows flexible adaptation to different institutional conditions and participant needs, making the program replicable in similar pesantren settings. Moreover, the use of structured evaluation instruments supports continuous monitoring and improvement, ensuring that the program remains relevant and effective in strengthening santri's emotional and spiritual readiness for future family life.

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