



Psychoeducation program “Me and Marriage: Marriage with Preparation” as a prevention of early marriage

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ABSTRACT

Commitment to a romantic relationship is a developmental task of early adulthood that usually manifests as marriage. The government has established a minimum age of marriage for both men and women. Nonetheless, specific regions in West Java still witness marriages of couples under this prescribed age when early marriage can bring difficulties for young couples adjusting their roles as husband or wife, parents and partaking in childcare and conflict resolution. This issue is evident in Cipacing, Jatinangor, with many instances of adolescent marriages, child stunting cases, and adolescents committing risky behaviors. Thus, the present Community Engagement (PPM) program aims to provide knowledge and awareness for adolescents and early adults regarding the significance of preparatory measures before marriage. The activity focuses on educating the meaning of marriage, essential premarital preparations, and self-identification related to marriage readiness. A total of 40 adolescents and early adults participated in the activity. Our analysis of pre-and post-test scores revealed improved mean scores by a majority of participants, indicating increased knowledge. Recommendations for future activities include optimizing the socialization process by adopting a more concise timeframe and employing a delivery method that ensures ease of comprehension, allowing the next program to run more efficiently and effectively.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a normal life stage and a developmental milestone for early adults (McGoldrick et al., 2016). Emerging adulthood is a transitional period between adolescence and full adulthood, focusing on individuals between the ages of 18 and 25 (Arnett, 2000). However, the changing demographics, educational and employment opportunities, and gender roles have shifted to include those between the ages of 21 and 29 (McGoldrick et al., 2016). In Indonesia, marriage is governed by Law Number 16 of 2019, with minimum age requirements of at least 19 years old for men and 16 years for women. BKKBN recommends optimal ages for a marriage of 21 for women and 25 for men (Badan Pemeriksaan Keuangan, 2019), but UNICEF data rank Indonesia as the 8th highest country and second highest in ASEAN for early marriages.

According to UNICEF data from 2020, West Java is among the top three provinces in Indonesia with the highest incidence of early marriages. Early marriage can cause serious consequences for adolescents, including dropping out of school, divorce, and domestic violence due to a lack of economic and psychological preparedness to take on marital responsibilities. Notwithstanding, marriage is still defined as a solution to life's challenges, e.g., living expenses, job and career uncertainty, and extended family difficulties (McGoldrick et al., 2016; Olson et al., 2019). The primary causes of early marriage among adolescents are educational, economic, cultural factors, and risky behaviors, such as promiscuous sex and out-of-wedlock pregnancy (Jones & Gubhaju, 2008).

In psychology, prepared marriages tend to last longer (Olson et al., 2019). Premarital consultation helps people elevate their relationship by knowing themselves and their potential spouse better, communicating their expectations in the relationship, solving problems together, and identifying compatible characteristics before being married (Shahhosseini et al., 2014). Individuals who lack marriage preparation are predicted to face more difficulties in adjusting to the intricacies of marriage, be prone to conflicts with their partners, and be more likely to end their marriage. It demonstrates the increased likelihood of divorce in young marriages compared to that in couples who are more psychologically mature and economically prepared. Individuals who marry before 20 often experience challenges in adapting to the responsibilities of marriage, which ultimately reinforces their decision to divorce. West Java had the highest divorce rate in Indonesia in 2022, with the primary reasons being ongoing conflict, economic struggles, leaving the marital home, and domestic abuse (Diskominfo Jawa Barat, 2023). Based on the West Java population's age demographics, the number of divorcees in the 20-24 age group accrued from 14,303 to 14,744 residents in 2020-2021 (Dinas Kependudukan dan Pencatatan Sipil, 2022).

Furthermore, differences between rural and urban areas also lead to differences in marriage statistics (Jones & Gubhaju, 2008). For instance, the 15-39 age group of unmarried individuals is more common in urban areas. Another study found that the age of first marriage for women is older in urban areas in comparison with that in suburban and rural areas (Ayuwardany & Kautsar, 2021; Qibtiyah, 2014; Sutanto et al., 2019). According to the Indonesia Demographic and Health Survey (2017), the median ages of first marriage for women aged 25-49 in urban and rural areas were 22.9 years and 20.9 years, respectively (Imron et al., 2020). As a result, teenagers in rural areas are at a higher risk of experiencing early marriage.

Departing from the statistical data, further review was conducted by assessing the Cipacing community living in Cipacing, Jatinangor, Sumedang. As the Jatinangor area has transformed into an educational district, the Cipacing area has also changed in orientation and transitioned from a rural to urban community. Based on data collected, Cipacing is becoming an industrial area, especially in the craft and trade sectors. Regrettably, early marriage cases are often left unreported, hampering to obtain accurate data on the number of early marriages in Cipacing. A certain assessment brought to light no least four cases of early marriage recorded by the village head in each settlement in 2023.

Based on interviews with the village head, wedding officiants, PKK cadres, and youth group representatives (Karang Taruna), adolescents in Cipacing exhibit risky behavior such as pre-marital sex, drunk, reckless speeding, drug use and prostitution. The field assessment also found four recorded early marriages, but most interviewees pointed out several unrecorded ones. Parents' fear of their adolescent children engaging in behaviors that brought about unplanned marriage was among the factors fueling early marriage in Cipacing. In simpler terms, early marriage was still deemed a solution.

Additionally, the field assessment revealed approximately 54 cases of stunting in Cipacing. While early marriage might not directly cause stunting, it was imperative to consider parental knowledge regarding nutrition during pregnancy and the postpartum period. Previous studies found that early

marriage is a risk factor that significantly impacts child development, particularly in the context of stunting (Hanifah & Stefani, 2022; Kasjono et al., 2020; Mediani et al., 2023). Stunting is a condition where children experience impaired growth and development due to poor nutrition, recurrent infections, and inadequate psychosocial stimulation (World Health Organisation (WHO), 2015). The relationship between early marriage and potential child stunting can be explained through various perspectives. (Kasjono et al., 2020) classified it into two factors: direct and indirect. Direct factors are based on unmet nutritional needs and maternal illness. It is important to note that this explanation is based on objective evidence and does not include any subjective evaluations. Couples who marry at an early age often lack the resources, knowledge, and access to provide optimal nutrition for themselves and their children. Inadequate nutritional intake during a child’s growth stage can lead to impaired growth and development, making the child more vulnerable (Pangaribuan et al., 2020). Indirect factors, such as socioeconomic factors, culture, and available health facilities, can also contribute (Efevbera et al., 2017; Kasjono et al., 2020).

Early marriage is often caused by problems in the education of adolescent partners (Bappenas & Ministry of Women and Children Empowerment, 2020; United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), 2001). Limited education is associated with a lack of awareness of proper child care practices, including nutrition, which can increase the risk of stunting (Vollmer et al., 2017). Similarly, from an economic perspective, financial challenges faced by early married couples can hinder the availability of adequate nutrition and health care for growing children, potentially leading to stunting (Cameron et al., 2020). Additionally, early marriage and stunting cases are more prevalent in rural areas (Cameron et al., 2020; Sserwanja et al., 2021; UNICEF, 2020). These cultural norms and traditions may contribute to unsafe childcare practices. They can affect children’s dietary habits, health-seeking behaviours, and overall well-being (Wells et al., 2022). The relationship between early marriage and child stunting is complex and requires a comprehensive understanding of the various factors involved.

Unfortunately, there is a lack of knowledge and skills on the part of parents with regard to the preparation of their children for marriage. Therefore, the children lack comprehensive marriage preparation regarding readiness to face marriage, communication within a household, and conflict management. Pre-marriage preparation in Cipacing only includes administrative and general health aspects. As argued by PKK cadres and Karang Taruna members in Cipacing, the mental and economic unpreparedness of young couples leads to inadequate knowledge in providing proper parenting and healthy nutrition for their children to achieve ideal child development.

A study shows that marriage preparation education can prevent stunted growth through increased knowledge about marriage and effective programs that enhance understanding among individuals, including psychoeducation. Research demonstrates that psychoeducation is a recommended intervention which effectively promotes understanding (Gusain et al., 2020). Accordingly, we propose a community engagement initiative through the psychoeducation program “Me and Marriage: Marriage with Preparation”. It provides knowledge and insights for early adults and adolescents in Cipacing and sets three following goals: (1) Understanding the meaning of marriage and the realities of marriage; (2) Understanding the importance of self-knowledge and the partner’s character before marriage; (3) Understanding how to manage and solve conflicts in relationships.

2. METHODS

The psychoeducation program “Me and Marriage: Marriage with Preparation” consisted of three phases: preparation, implementation, and evaluation.

Preparation Phase

The preparation phase was made up of stages, i.e., a literature review and a field assessment. In the first stage, we investigated various previous studies on marriage issues in Indonesia, with a particular focus on West Java. We analyzed data on age at first marriage, marriage preparation, divorce, early marriage, child marriage, and the relationship between early marriage and stunting and examined government initiatives aimed at addressing early marriage and stunting. We figured out that in 2022, 25 marriage dispensations were granted in Jatinangor and that psychological readiness was essential to a successful marriage, while early marriage was associated with family instability and divorce. The findings of the review served as a framework for the field evaluation.

Our field assessment was conducted in July 2023 using observation and interview methods. We applied the snowball sampling technique to gather input from ten individuals, composed of three Karang Taruna representatives, who represented villagers aged adolescents to early adults, three wedding officiants from an institution that aided with marriage preparation, three PKK cadres, and a mother with a stunted child. The assessment indicated four recorded early marriages, but most interviewees pointed out several unrecorded ones. Parents' fear of their adolescent children engaging in behaviors that brought about unplanned marriage was among the factors fueling early marriage in Cipacing. In simpler terms, early marriage was still deemed a solution. During the field evaluation, it was also found that 54 children in Cipacing had stunted growth. Even while stunting may not be directly caused by early marriage, parental understanding about nutrition throughout pregnancy and the postpartum period was crucial to consider.

Grounded on field assessment results, a follow-up plan for addressing early marriage-related issues was determined, namely a marriage preparation seminar in the form of psychoeducation targeting adolescents and early adults. The activity involved *Karang Taruna*, student representatives from junior and senior high schools, and PKK cadres.

The material program consisted of slides, educational booklets, and pre- and post-test forms. The slides served as visual aids during the explanation session to aid participants in understanding the material more easily. The booklet was used to address the problem of stunting and risky behaviour among adolescents, and was distributed to all villages through existing community institutions. Pre- and post-test forms were used to identify the psychoeducation activity's effect on participants' knowledge related to marriage. The form contained 15 multiple-choice question items related to the activity materials, i.e., the meaning of marriage, things to be prepared before marriage, and forms of communication in conflict resolution efforts. An example of the items was "What is the main basis in building a strong marriage?" Participants completed the pre-test guided by facilitators for ten minutes.

Implementation Phase

The psychoeducational session was held on Saturday, July 29th, 2023, and led by a psychologist who specialized in marriage counseling and two developmental psychologists. The Cipacing village head, wedding officiants, and female PKK cadres also attended it. The psychoeducation activity was supported by students from different study programs at Universitas Padjadjaran, who acted as facilitators.

Overall, the psychoeducation was conducted face-to-face for about 180 minutes. The activities began with the opening, pre-test filling, material delivery, discussion sessions, post-test, and closing. The material delivery consist of 3 sessions of material delivery, each lasting 30 minutes. The first session began with the speaker elucidating data and facts about marriage in Indonesia, early marriage, divorce, stunting, and the relationship between the data and the meaning and reality of marriage. The second

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session emphasized the crucial importance of recognizing potential partners and highlighted several important characteristic to look for in a partner and how to get to know a partner. In the third session, the speaker addressed conflicts in marriage, asked participants to identify sources of conflicts in marriage, and ended the session by administering reinforcement on how to build a healthy marriage. We also observed participants’ reactions during these sessions and recognized their positive reactions, as evidenced by their enthusiasm and willingness to listen attentively, take notes on the material, and give examples from their daily observations.

Evaluation Phase

Observation and evaluation questionnaire fulfillment were undertaken during activity to evaluate participants’ responses. Furthermore, a post-test evaluation was carried out to determine whether the psychoeducation activity improved knowledge related to marriage preparation. Therefore, post-test and activity evaluation questionnaires were distributed at the end of the session.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The psycho-educational session was held on Saturday 29 July 2023. The session was led by one psychologist who specializes in marriage counseling and two developmental psychologists. There were 43 participants, including 27 adolescents and 13 young adults. Most of the participants were from the youth organization of Cipacing Village, with only 8 representatives from local schools being present. It was attended by the Cipacing Village Head, stakeholder who licenses the marriage religiously, and PKK cadre women. The psychoeducation activity was supported by students from different study programs at Padjadjaran University who acted as facilitators. Implementation phase consists of several activities: opening, pre-test, material session, discussion, post-test, games and closing.



Figure 1. Opening session by facilitators, remarks by the village head, and prayer together by marriage officiant

The psycho-educational activity began with a speech by the head of the village of Cipacing. She explained the purpose and importance of this initiative for the community. Subsequently, the *Penghulu* representative led a prayer to ensure the seamless execution and usefulness of the activity. At this stage, the facilitator worked to build rapport and enthusiasm among the participants to ensure that they stayed involved. The facilitator also guided the development of the learning contract with the participants to ensure that the activity proceeds conductively. A depiction of the initial phase can be observed in Figure 1.

Pre-Test

This psychoeducation activity aims to increase the knowledge of teenagers and early adults in Cipacing Village about the importance of marriage readiness. Therefore, in this activity, pre and post psychoeducation assessments were carried out to see the effect of this psychoeducation activity on the participants' knowledge. The participants' knowledge related to marriage was measured through a pretest questionnaire before the presentation of the material. This pre-post questionnaire contains 15 items in the form of multiple-choice questions related to the activity material, namely the meaning of marriage, things that need to be prepared before marriage and forms of communication in conflict resolution efforts. One example of an item is "What is the main basis in building a strong marriage?". Participants completed the pretest guided by the facilitator for 10 minutes. The stage of completing the pretest questionnaire can be seen in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Participants fill out the pretest questionnaire

Material Session

The marriage preparation psychoeducation activity is divided into 3 sessions of 30 minutes each. The material was delivered in a face-to-face and interactive manner by psychologists working in premarital education in Bandung. During the session, participants were encouraged to actively participate by expressing their opinions. They were also given the opportunity to ask questions if things were unclear or confusing.

The first session started with the resource person explaining data and facts about marriage in Indonesia, early marriage, divorce and stunting. The speakers also explained the relationship between the data and the meaning of marriage and the reality of marriage. In this first session, the resource person discussed the facts and realities of marriage in relation to recommendations for readiness and appropriate timing for marriage. The second session focused on the importance of recognising potential partners. The speakers also discussed the important things to look for in a partner and how to get to know a partner. In the third session, the speakers discussed conflict in marriage. The material started

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with identifying sources of conflict in marriage. At the end of the session, the resource person provided reinforcement on how to build a healthy marriage.

Observations of the participants’ reactions were also made during this session. Participants seemed to have positive reactions as evidenced by enthusiasm, active listening, taking notes on the material or participants giving examples from their daily observations. The material session and examples of material slides are shown in Figure 3 and Figure 4.



Figure 3. Providing material by resource persons



Figure 4. Material sample

Discussion Session

After the marriage preparation session concluded, the facilitator guided the discussion by encouraging participants to ask questions directly to the speakers. The teenagers and young adults exhibited great enthusiasm, asking numerous questions pertaining to their current romantic partners, relationship obstacles, strategies for resolving conflicts, and expectations for the future of their relationships. On the other hand, PKK cadres are also involved in the discussion by asking questions

or giving examples of their experiences. The discussion proceeded collaboratively through exchanging views and inviting other participants to share their experiences for mutual learning purposes. Figure 5 provides an overview of the discussion activities.



Figure 5. Discussion session

Post-Test

Participants in this phase were given the same questionnaire, which had the same items as the pre-test session. Within ten minutes, the participants had to independently accomplish the questionnaire. The post-test questionnaire findings will be assessed to determine whether the program objectives were met and whether it was successful in improving participants understanding

Closing

At the end of the training, the facilitator gave reward to the participants who were active during the program. The participants were also given the opportunity to contact the speakers if they had any further inquiries regarding marriage readiness.

The PPM program outputs comprised data on pre-test and post-test scores of 40 participants. We conducted a quantitative analysis of the data by determining the mean difference between the scores, the results of which are pointed out in Figure 7. Based on Figure 7, there is a significant increase in the difference in the mean score of participant's knowledge about marriage between before and after the implementation of the PPM program.

The data were analyzed using the Wilcoxon test. We identified five people with lower post-test scores relative to their pre-test ones at a Mean Rank of 11.40 and 28 with higher post-test scores than

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their pre-test ones at a Mean Rank of 18.00. Additionally, seven people had identical post-test scores to their pre-test ones, thereby presenting no change. Table 1 displays the difference test results.



Figure 6. Closing

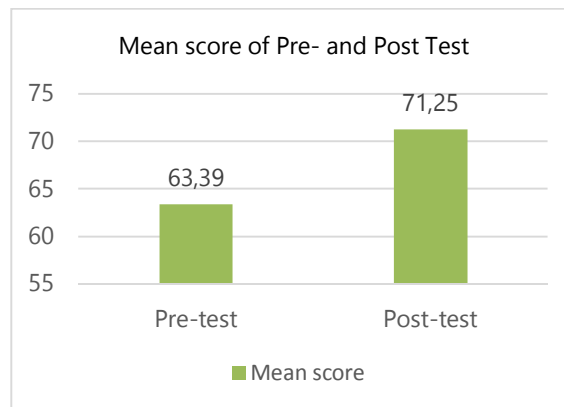


Figure 7. Mean score of pre-test and post-test

Table 1. T-test results

		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Post-Test – Pre-Test	Negative Ranks	5 ^a	11.40	57.00
	Positive Ranks	28 ^b	18.00	504.00
	Ties	7 ^c		
	Total	40		

Note: (a) Post-test < Pre-test; (b) Post-test > Pre-test; (c) Post-test = Pre-test

The program was evaluated using the observation method during its implementation, and at the end of the program, participants were asked to complete a feedback questionnaire on the activities they performed. Figure 8 shows the questionnaire results.

Additionally, we documented their expectations regarding future PPM activities, as presented in Figure 9. Nevertheless, 13.79% of respondents did not recommend any topics.

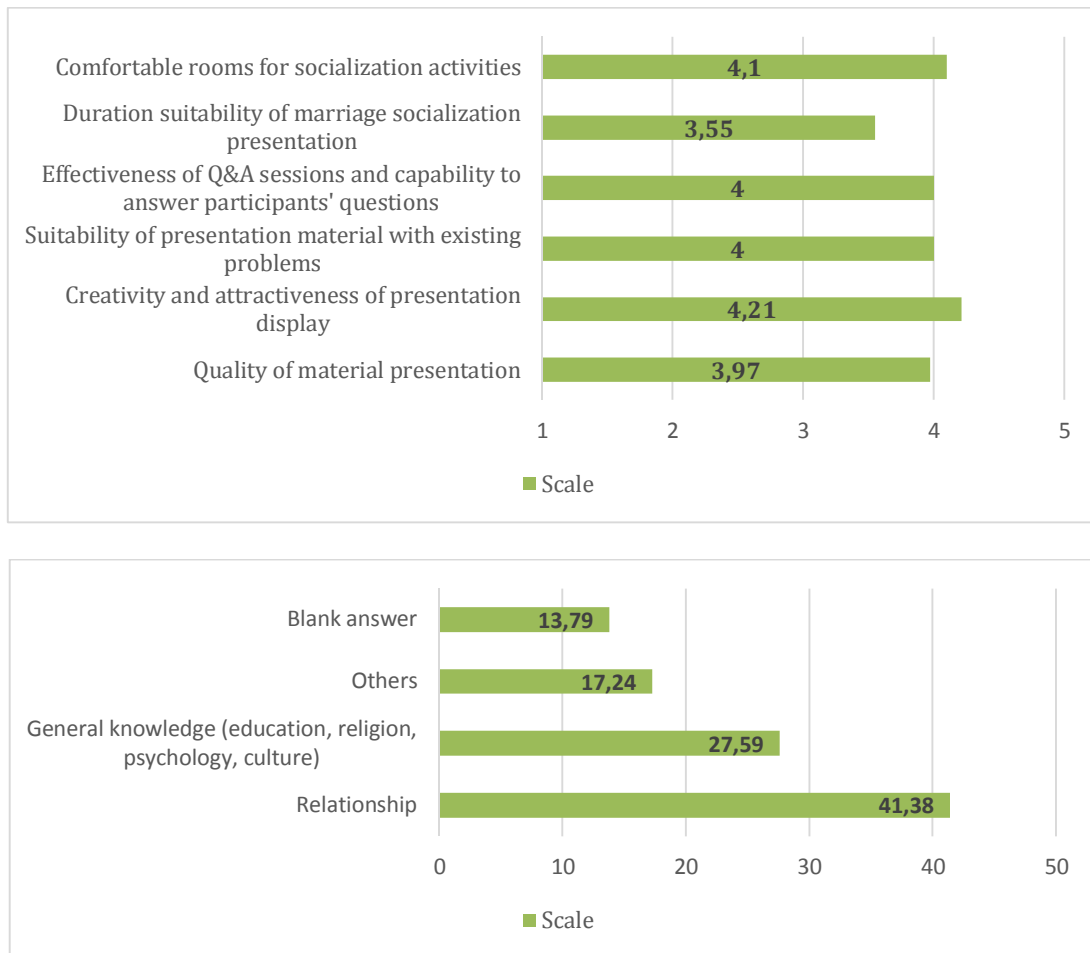


Figure 8. Participants' feedback
Figure 9. Topic recommendations from participants

Discussion

The psychoeducation program "Me and Marriage: Marriage with Preparation" aimed to enhance adolescents' and early adults' knowledge in Cipacing, Jatinangor, Sumedang, as it was pivotal to furnish young people with accurate information about the potential risks and challenges of early marriage. This group of participants was chosen because they were considered vulnerable to risky behaviors and there was still a strong perception of marriage as a solution to problems as regards children.

Considering that marriage at a young age was not necessarily accompanied by mental readiness (Badruzaman, 2021) or economic readiness (Agustian, 2013), the purposes of this program were also to

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advocate premarital education and awareness on the issues concerning young people’s preparedness for marriage (Ardiwinata et al., 2019). Some previous studies found that pre-marriage education escalated the quality of relationships in marriage (Carroll & Doherty, 2003) and could predict marital satisfaction levels (Stanley et al., 2006; Yilmaz & Kalkan, 2010). In addition, it heightened communication between married couples (Fawcett et al., 2010) and dispelled idealized expectations about marriage (Rajabi & Abbasi, 2020). by providing examples, facts, and experiences which depicted the reality of marriage.

Besides, the psychoeducation program “Me and Marriage: Marriage with Preparation” was designated as the initial step for stakeholders in Cipacing to prepare its youth for their next developmental task. As stated in the Directorate of Islamic Public Guidance of the Ministry of Religious Affairs Decree Number 379/2018, every prospective couple should attend marriage guidance held at the local Religious Affairs Office before marriage (Nurfachriyah & Yusiyaka, 2022). The government offered pre-marriage programs, e.g., Suscatin (*Kursus calon pengantin*) by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (2019). It was a short briefing program for prospective brides planning to marry. A new program was then proposed to replace Suscatin, which was Marriage Guidance or *Bimbingan Perkawinan* (Binwin), a national initiative to reduce divorce rates and promote the formation of *sakinah* (happy, loving, and supportive) families. The program intended to produce high-quality human resources aligned with *Nawa Cita* (a nine-point development program) and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In this PPM, materials presented in this program covered fundamental knowledge essential for individuals to consider before deciding to get married. During the first session, we provided information on the definition of marriage and the realities of married life, including relevant data and phenomena in Indonesia. It comported with Stanley (2001), who emphasized the significance of premarital education in fostering the meaning of marriage and highlighting the urgency of commitment in a marriage. In addition, previous studies have also found that premarital education can also help reduce idealized expectations about marriage (Rajabi & Abbasi, 2020). This is achieved by providing examples, facts, and experiences that depict the reality of marriage in this first session.

Meanwhile, the second and third sessions brought into focus the importance of raising self-awareness and understanding the future spouse’s character to effectively manage conflicts which might arise in marriage. The focus conformed to a meta-analytic study which declared that ongoing premarital education enabled individuals to comprehend themselves and their potential partners and stressed the importance of communication, conflict management, and the quality of relationships (Carroll & Doherty, 2003).

Primary premarital education could actually be undertaken by providing information and counseling services for adolescents with related problems and calling for solutions. The pre-and post-test results demonstrated a higher proportion of participants with increased post-test scores compared to that with decreased or stagnant ones, exhibiting the acquisition of higher knowledge related to marriage after partaking in this program. The program deliverables were consistent with those of other studies conducted in Patuk, Gunung Kidul (Nurjanah et al., 2013), Tanah Sareal, Bogor (Nurfachriyah & Yusiyaka, 2022), and Biluhu, Gorontalo (Sari et al., 2023).

Furthermore, most participants gave a positive evaluation, as indicated by the mean score of the evaluated program implementation aspects, which was 4.00, pointing out that all aspects were rated good. The evaluated criteria included material delivery quality, presentation clarity and comprehensibility, material relevance to the problems being addressed, the speaker’s ability to engage with the audience, question and answer session effectiveness, the appropriate duration of the material delivery, and convenience in using the program venue. Likewise, all participants responded positively to material

delivery sessions, as predicated on our observations of their enthusiasm for the materials delivered, laughter when humor was proposed, nods, or other responses acknowledging that the material content was related to their daily lives. PKK cadres being present as participants also improved the depth of the discussion and provided more reinforcement for participants.

Additionally, we documented their expectations regarding future PPM. Among the expectations were more advanced relationship discussions covering types of marriage, perceptions of dating, early marriage, relationships, and post-marriage adaptation. Additional topics, including education, religion, psychology, and culture, were also suggested. Nevertheless, some of respondents did not recommend any topics, yet the majority of participants expressed their appreciation and admitted the benefits of this activity.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Community Service (PPM) program "Me and Marriage: Marriage with Preparation" aims to increase knowledge and awareness for early adults and adolescents in Cipacing about understanding the meaning of marriage and the realities of marriage, the importance of self-knowledge and the partner's character before marriage and how to manage and solve conflicts in relationships in order to prevent early marriage without preparation. This PPM engendered increased knowledge among adolescents and early adults regarding the topic, as shown by higher post-test scores of most participants. Participants could identify the meaning and realities of marriage, recognize the crucial importance of understanding their character and potential partners before marriage, and learn conflict resolution skills for relationships. They also gave a positive reaction to the activities and materials provided. Participants also expressed interest in exploring relationship topics further, e.g., types of marriage, perceptions of dating, early marriage, relationships, and post-marriage adaptation.

Although evaluation of the program seems to be convincing, the conducted program has several limitations. First, due to time constraints, the material is too dense to be easily understood by the participants. Related to that, the second limitation is the program consists of a lecture and discussion session only. Therefore, participants can be considered to play a less active role in the program compared to other approaches such as group discussion, games, or reflection. Third, the evaluation items in the pre- and post-tests are the same, which may play some role in the outcome of this study. Furthermore, based on the limitations described above, there are three recommendations that can be proposed. First, using simpler language accompanied by concrete examples and short video shows that relate to adolescent so that the material is easier to understand. Second, with more time windows, the future program may need to consider using lecture combine with roleplay and focus group discussion approach, in which the participants could share their experiences with each other and enable them to be more engage in the sessions. Third, it is recommended to use distinct items with similar difficulties in the pre- and post-tests to ensure the absence of learning effect.

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