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## Understanding Legal and Religious Dimensions of Early Marriage, and HIV/AIDS Education in Indonesia

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**Abstract** – Early marriage and a lack of understanding about HIV/AIDS are critical issues that threaten the health and future of adolescents in Indonesia. This community service activity aims to measure the effectiveness of educational workshops in increasing the knowledge and awareness of students at SMPN 2 Serang Baru, Bekasi, regarding the legal and religious dimensions of early marriage and HIV/AIDS education. By combining storytelling sessions, Focus Group Discussions (FGD), interactive quizzes, reflections, and pre- and post-tests, the results of the pre- and post-test scores showed a statistically significant increase in knowledge among participants. In accordance with Law No. 16 of 2019, the health and social impacts of early marriage, as well as the transmission and prevention of HIV/AIDS, were addressed. Qualitative results from the FGDs and reflections support these findings, indicating positive changes in participants' attitudes and awareness. It is concluded that this educational workshop model, measured through pre- and post-tests, is highly effective in enhancing adolescents' knowledge about sensitive issues and can be replicated as an evidence-based intervention program in other schools.

**Keywords:** Early Marriage, Youth Education, Educational Workshops, Pre-test Post-test, Community Service

### Introduction

Indonesia is currently experiencing a demographic dividend, a crucial period that positions the adolescent population as a strategic asset for the nation's future. However, adolescence is also a challenging transitional phase, marked by biological changes, rapid psychological development, and increased social pressure. In the digital age, Indonesian adolescents are now faced with a limitless, often unfiltered flow of information, increasing the risk of misinformation on crucial issues such as reproductive health and sexuality. Psychologically, adolescents have a natural tendency to take risks and are strongly influenced by peer pressure, while culturally, discussions about sexuality within the family and community are often considered taboo. This combination of factors creates a vulnerable environment, where two deep-rooted social problems are entrenched: early marriage and the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Early marriage remains a challenging human development challenge in Indonesia. Although the government has taken progressive steps by revising the minimum age for marriage to 19 for both men and women through Law No. 16 of 2019, its prevalence remains high. Data from the National Socioeconomic Survey (Susenas) from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) shows that the number of child marriages remains at an alarming level. This practice is often perpetuated by poverty, cultural traditions, and narrow religious interpretations. Furthermore, the existence of a "marriage dispensation" mechanism, which can be appealed to the courts, often creates a legal loophole that legitimizes underage marriage. The impacts are multidimensional and devastating: health-wise, adolescent girls face a significantly higher risk of complications during pregnancy and childbirth; educationally, early marriage almost always leads to school dropout, which then perpetuates an inter-generational cycle of poverty; and psychologically, it increases vulnerability to domestic violence and mental health problems.

This vulnerability directly intersects with another public health threat, HIV/AIDS. Data from the Indonesian Ministry of Health (Kemenkes) consistently shows that adolescents and

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young adults (aged 15-24) contribute a significant proportion of total new HIV cases each year. A lack of accurate knowledge about transmission and prevention is a key driver. However, a greater challenge is the social stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS. This stigma creates a silent epidemic, where fear of discrimination and social exclusion prevents individuals, especially adolescents, from seeking information, getting tested, and accessing treatment services. As a result, many remain unaware of their status and potentially transmit the virus further, often in the context of unequal or risky relationships, such as early marriage.

### **Method**

This activity was designed using a mixed methods approach that integrates quantitative and qualitative analysis. The core design implemented was a quasi-experimental one-group pre-test-post-test model, aimed at measuring changes in participants' knowledge before and after the intervention. The intervention took the form of an educational workshop on Tuesday, July 22, 2025, at SMPN 2 Serang Baru, Bekasi Regency. Sixty-eight ninth-grade students were selected based on recommendations and availability from the school.

The activity procedure began with a preparation phase, including coordination with the school and the committee. On the day of the event, participant registration was conducted, led by all committee members. This was followed by an introduction session with Nafia and Cia as MCs, and a pre-test questionnaire was completed. This questionnaire served as the primary quantitative data collection instrument, containing several questions measuring knowledge about early marriage and HIV/AIDS. The activity continued with a storytelling session guided by Shella and Syahren to build empathy, followed by a group discussion. Participants were divided into several small groups and qualitative data was explored using a discussion guide containing open-ended questions. The next session was the presentation of the core material by Tio and Lulu which contained an explanation of material about early marriage according to religion and law and what its impacts are, as well as the definition, symptoms, and treatment of HIV / AIDS. The activity ended with an internal educational quiz guided by Zakki which consisted of 5 types of questions: fact or myth, puzzles, agree or disagree, and mystery box. This quiz aims to evaluate the participants' understanding. After that, the closing session was carried out with reflection, filling in impressions and messages, and a group photo.

### **Results and Discussions**

A community service activity titled "Preventing Early Marriage and HIV/AIDS Education" was successfully held on Tuesday, July 22, 2025, at SMPN 2 Serang Baru, Bekasi. The event, hosted by MCs Alycia (Cia) and Nafia, was enthusiastically attended by 68 ninth-grade students. The workshop, designed with a participatory approach, proved successful in increasing participants' understanding, awareness, and critical thinking regarding the issues of early marriage and HIV/AIDS, as reflected in the quantitative and qualitative data collected.

To measure the cognitive impact of the activity, a pre-test was conducted before the session began and a post-test after all material was presented. Data analysis revealed a significant increase in understanding across all measured aspects. Before the activity, students' initial understanding of the risks of early marriage was generally only 30%. However, after participating in the workshop, participants' understanding increased dramatically, reaching an

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average of 80%. This improvement was broken down into several key aspects:

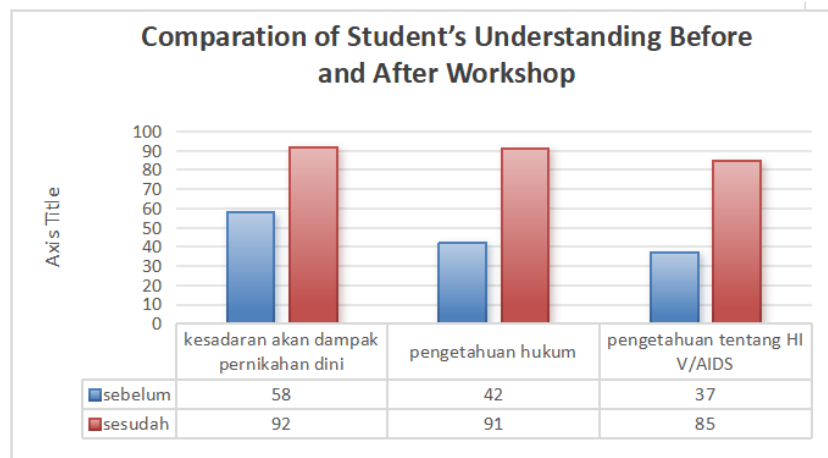


Figure 1. Table of Comparison

These data indicate that interactive and participatory educational methods are very effective in transferring complex knowledge to adolescents.

### Qualitative Analysis Based on Activity Sessions

#### 1. Storytelling as an Empathy Generator

The opening session, presented by Syahren and Marshella (Shella), involved a storytelling session titled "Putri dan Pilihan yang Terlalu Cepat." This session told the story of a fictional teenager forced into early marriage and successfully touched the participants' emotional core. Observations showed that participants listened with serious and attentive expressions. This narrative learning approach proved effective as a gateway to building empathy and the relevance of the issue to their lives, in keeping with the developmental stage of adolescents who are searching for identity. As a result, in the initial discussion session, participants were able to deduce the moral values from the story and relate them to the importance of education and aspirations.

#### 2. Presentation of Core Material by the Speakers

The presentation of the core material was delivered by Tio and Lulu, covering three main pillars:

**Legal and Social Dimensions:** Lulu explained the multidimensional impacts of early marriage and its legal aspects, particularly Law No. 16 of 2019. Many participants were initially unaware of the legal age limit of 19 or assumed parental permission was sufficient. This session successfully addressed these misconceptions.

**Religious Dimension:** This material corrected the mistaken belief that religion encourages early marriage. Using a contextual approach and an introduction to the principles of maqasid sharia (the objectives of Islamic law), participants were encouraged to understand that physical and spiritual readiness is a primary requirement for marriage in Islam. Participants' enthusiasm was evident in critical questions such as, "If you marry young because you're afraid of sin, is it still

wrong?" which led to in-depth discussions about the priority of moral education and self-control.

*HIV/AIDS Education:* Tio delivered this material using an interactive approach to distinguish facts from myths. The results were significant; participants' ability to correctly identify myths jumped from 40% to 85%. This session also successfully built empathy through the "STOP Discrimination against PLHIV" campaign, where participants wrote positive messages as a form of support.

### *3. Active Participation through Interactive Discussions and Quizzes*

The success of this workshop was also supported by the active involvement of the participants. In the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) session, 68 participants were divided into small groups to analyze cases from the storytelling session. The students demonstrated great enthusiasm and curiosity, with some even sharing stories about friends in their communities who experienced early marriage.

The interactive quiz session, led by Zakki, culminated in a fun and evaluative event. The quizzes were designed in several formats, including Fact or Myth, Riddles, Agree or Disagree, and the Mystery Educational Box. In the "Agree or Disagree" session, more than 90% of participants expressed their disapproval of early marriage without mental and financial preparation, demonstrating a shift in mindset toward being more critical and rational.

### **Discussions and Recommendations**

Overall, the quantitative and qualitative results reinforced each other, proving that the workshop's holistic and participatory approach was highly effective. Improved post-test scores indicated successful knowledge transfer (cognitive aspect), while enthusiastic discussions, critical questions, and reflections indicated changes in attitudes and awareness (affective aspect). Many participants admitted that this was the first time they had received comprehensive information on this issue and became more aware of the importance of making informed decisions.

Support from the school, including the principal and teachers, was also a key factor in the success. They appreciated the non-patronizing approach, which balanced the logical and emotional aspects of adolescents, and hoped that similar activities could become a regular program. This confirms the importance of synergy between educational institutions, academics, and the community in the prevention of early marriage and HIV/AIDS education.

This activity successfully implemented several learning theories. According to experiential learning theory, learning processes involving experience, reflection, and application have been shown to be more lasting. Furthermore, the workshop successfully influenced three components of the Theory of Planned Behavior: changing attitudes to become more critical, strengthening subjective norms through group discussions, and increasing behavioral control by providing legal and health education. Thus, this program not only equips participants with knowledge, but also empowers them to become agents of change in their peer

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environment.



Figure 2. Photo with teachers, committee and audience

## Conclusion

A community service workshop at SMPN 2 Serang Baru successfully increased the understanding and awareness of 68 students regarding the crucial issues of early marriage and HIV/AIDS. The participatory and interactive approach, combining storytelling, discussions, and quizzes, proved highly effective. This significant increase in understanding was evident through pre- and post-test data, particularly regarding the legal age for marriage, health impacts, and HIV/AIDS facts and myths. Qualitatively, the activity also successfully changed participants' perceptions, corrected religious misconceptions, and fostered empathy and a desire to avoid discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA).

This success demonstrates that a holistic, dialogical, and youth-relevant educational approach is key to fostering critical thinking. For sustainability, it is recommended that similar programs be replicated by actively involving parents and teachers and adapting the materials into more dynamic formats such as games and digital content. This workshop is not simply a transfer of knowledge, but rather the first step in empowering young people to make healthy and responsible decisions for their future.

## Acknowledgements

We express our sincere gratitude to the various parties who provided their full support, ensuring the successful and smooth implementation of this community service activity. We extend our gratitude to the partner school, SMPN 2 Serang Baru in North Cikarang District, especially to the principal and the accompanying teachers for their availability, trust, and full support throughout the activity. We also extend our gratitude to the AIDS Commission (KPA) for providing valuable information and materials for the activity. In particular, the authors extend their gratitude to our advisor from President University, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Dedi Rianto Rahadi, M.M., for his guidance, academic guidance, and motivation throughout the entire process, from planning, implementation, and evaluation.

Our deepest appreciation also goes to all students in grades 9C and 9D of SMPN 2 Serang Baru who actively participated, demonstrated high enthusiasm, and were open to each session we facilitated. Finally, thank you to all the student team members for their incredible cooperation, enthusiasm, and dedication. Without their solidarity and shared responsibility, this

project would not have been a success. We hope this project will provide tangible contributions and long-term benefits for all involved.

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