

Adolescent Counseling on the Impact of Early Marriage Towards Mororejo Village Free from Stunting

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Early marriage remains a phenomenon that is quite high in Pasuruan Regency, including in Mororejo Village, Tosari District. This condition has serious implications for reproductive health, education, as well as the risk of stunting in children. Through community service activities (Abdimas), counseling was conducted for adolescents with the aim of increasing understanding of the impact of early marriage as well as supporting the realization of Mororejo Village free from stunting. **Method:** The method used was interactive lectures, group discussions, and role play accompanied by pre and post activity evaluations. **Results:** The results showed a significant increase in adolescent knowledge, where previously 65% of participants did not understand the relationship between early marriage and stunting, then after counseling more than 85% were able to explain the impact well. In addition, there was a positive change in attitude, shown by the commitment of adolescents to delay the age of marriage and increase attention to reproductive health. **Novelty:** This activity proves that an educative-participatory approach is effective in increasing adolescents' critical awareness and can be a strategy to prevent early marriage as well as reduce stunting rates in Mororejo Village.

INTRODUCTION

Community empowerment is one of the main pillars in efforts towards sustainable development, especially in rural areas that have economic potential and natural resources that have not been fully optimized [1], [2], [3], [4], [5], [6]. Mororejo Village, Tosari District, Pasuruan Regency, as one of the villages located in an area rich in natural resources and tourism beauty, faces significant challenges in achieving economic welfare and public health. In addition to this potential, the village also faces the issue of early marriage, which can result in stunting in children born, thereby hampering child development and community productivity in the future. Early marriage is still a serious problem in many villages in Indonesia, including Mororejo Village. Cultural, economic factors, and low knowledge of reproductive health encourage some adolescents to marry at an immature age [7], [8], [9], [10], [11]. Early marriage is often considered a quick solution to social problems, when in fact it raises new issues, especially related to maternal and child health. Adolescence is actually a period of growth that requires special attention, not a period to bear the burden of household responsibilities and pregnancy.

In 2024, cases of early marriage are still a serious problem in Pasuruan Regency. Until mid-September 2024, at least 273 applications for marriage dispensation were recorded at the Pasuruan Regency Religious Court. This figure shows that many adolescents still marry below the ideal age, generally influenced by economic factors,

nightlife, and reluctance to continue education. This condition not only affects the adolescents' future, but also poses a major risk of giving birth to a generation vulnerable to nutritional and health problems. The trend of early marriage in Pasuruan over the past five years has also tended to increase. Data show a significant surge from only 52 applications for marriage dispensation in 2019 to 482 cases in 2023. Although in 2024 there was a decrease in the number of applications compared to the previous year, the cases remain relatively high. This phenomenon is in line with conditions in rural areas, including Mororejo Village in Tosari District, where the community still faces similar problems.

The high rate of early marriage also contributes to the risk of stunting, because adolescents who marry and become pregnant at a young age are not physically or mentally ready to undergo pregnancy. This has the potential to give birth to babies with low birth weight or malnutrition. Meanwhile, the government is striving to reduce stunting rates, even in Pasuruan City, the prevalence was successfully reduced from 21.1% in 2022 to 11.7% in 2023, with an ambitious target of reaching 5% in 2024. Seeing this condition, preventing early marriage in Mororejo Village becomes very important. One step proposed by the local government is mandatory premarital education for young prospective brides and grooms, which includes aspects of reproductive health, economic planning, and nutrition understanding. If such programs are implemented intensively in villages, it is expected to reduce the number of early marriages while minimizing the risk of stunting. Thus, Mororejo Village can participate in realizing the great vision of becoming a stunting-free village and giving birth to a healthier and higher-quality generation.

Seeing these various problems, adolescent counseling on the impact of early marriage becomes very important in Mororejo Village. This counseling is expected to increase adolescents' awareness of the importance of maintaining health, delaying marriage age, and understanding the risks of stunting that may befall the next generation. With adequate knowledge, adolescents are expected to be able to make wiser decisions for their future, while realizing Mororejo Village that is healthy, of quality, and free from stunting.

RESEARCH METHOD

The method in the activity was carried out in several stages, among others:

a) Interactive Lectures

The delivery of material about the risks of early marriage and its relation to stunting was carried out through interactive lectures. This method was chosen so that participants obtained clear basic knowledge, supported by local data, pictures, or short videos. Interaction in the form of questions and answers was conducted so that adolescents could more easily understand and not remain passive.

b) Group Discussion (FGD)

After the delivery of material, adolescents were divided into small groups to discuss real cases, for example stories of early marriage experiences in the surrounding

environment or role-play simulations. This discussion aimed to foster critical awareness and train adolescents to express opinions and seek solutions together.

c) Educational Media (Posters & Leaflets)

To strengthen understanding, media in the form of posters, leaflets, and infographics explaining the relationship between early marriage and stunting were used. This media also served as continuous campaign materials that could be displayed at schools, adolescent health posts, or village halls.

d) Evaluation and Reflection

At the end of the activity, an evaluation was conducted in the form of a short questionnaire or quiz to measure the extent of adolescents' improved understanding. In addition, group reflection was carried out so that participants could express impressions, new understanding, and personal commitments to delay the age of marriage.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Abdimas activity was carried out in Mororejo Village, Tosari District, Pasuruan Regency, involving adolescents from various backgrounds (junior high school, senior high school students, and adolescents who were no longer in school). The activity began with interactive lectures presenting local data on early marriage and stunting, followed by group discussions, role play, and evaluation through short questionnaires. The results of the pre-activity questionnaire showed that most participants (about 65%) did not understand the relationship between early marriage and stunting. They considered early marriage to be more related to social or cultural problems only. However, after attending the counseling, the post-test results showed a significant increase: more than 85% of participants were able to explain the impact of early marriage on reproductive health, education, and the risk of stunting.

In addition to knowledge improvement, the activity also produced attitude changes. From the reflection session, most adolescents expressed a strong desire to delay marriage until a mature age (at least 21 years for women and 24 years for men). Some participants even suggested that similar activities be held regularly in schools or adolescent health posts so that the information could reach more groups. The results of the activity showed that the method of interactive lectures combined with group discussions and role play was proven effective in increasing the understanding of adolescents in Mororejo Village. Initially, their low awareness was caused by limited access to information and the strong influence of tradition. However, after being given material relevant to local data in 2024 (for example, 273 marriage dispensation applications in Pasuruan Regency up to September 2024), participants more easily understood that the problem of early marriage was truly close to their lives.



Figure 1. Youth Counseling Activities Mororejo Village.

These findings are in line with previous studies which stated that participation-based education can increase adolescents' critical awareness. The attitude change of participants who committed to delaying marriage age proves that counseling not only adds knowledge but also builds awareness to maintain reproductive health and the future. This is important because preventing early marriage is one of the strategic steps to reduce stunting rates in the village. However, the results of the activity also emphasized that one-time counseling is not enough to permanently change behavior. Program continuity is needed through collaboration with the village government, schools, adolescent health posts, and community leaders. Family support is also very important so that adolescents not only know but also dare to refuse early marriage that may be forced by the environment.

Thus, this Abdimas activity succeeded in providing a positive impact on the knowledge and attitudes of adolescents in Mororejo Village. In the future, the sustainability of programs through routine counseling, premarital education, and adolescent nutrition assistance will strongly support the realization of Mororejo Village free from stunting.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding : The Abdimas activity of adolescent counseling in Mororejo Village, Tosari District, Pasuruan Regency succeeded in increasing adolescents' knowledge and awareness of the impact of early marriage and its relation to stunting. Before counseling, the majority of adolescents did not understand the health, educational, and social risks of early marriage. However, after attending interactive lectures, group discussions, and role play, understanding increased to the point where more than 85% of participants were able to explain the risks. **Implication :** In addition to knowledge improvement, this activity also produced positive attitude changes, where adolescents expressed commitment to delaying the age of marriage and paying more attention to reproductive health and nutrition. These results show that an educative-participatory approach is effective in building critical awareness while supporting stunting prevention efforts. **Limitation :** The Abdimas activity was conducted in Mororejo Village with a specific group of adolescents, and the results may not represent all adolescents in Pasuruan Regency or in other regions. The reliance on pre and post counseling evaluation also limits the ability to measure long-term behavioral changes related to early marriage

and reproductive health. **Future Research** : Future research should expand the scope of counseling to a wider population and include longitudinal studies to observe whether increased knowledge and positive attitudes are sustained over time. It would also be useful to explore how family and community engagement can strengthen the effectiveness of adolescent counseling programs in preventing early marriage and stunting.

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