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Education on Prevention of Early Marriage as an Effort to Support Stunting Prevention in Adolescents Through Thematic KKN

Laurentius Ni, Valeria Sonya Juita, Volenta Tincek Diduk, Valentino Aoetpah, Lughesti Manis Naid, Okaviani Sajung, Natalia Stafani

[1,2,3,4,5,6,7]Universitas Katolik Indonesia Santu Paulus Ruteng, Nusa Tenggara Timur, Indonesia

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Correspondence address to:

Laurentius Ni, Universitas Katolik Indonesia Santu Paulus Ruteng, Nusa Tenggara Timur, Indonesia

Email address:
laurentiusniang@gmail.com

Abstract— This thematic community service program aimed to increase students' knowledge about early marriage and its health, psychological, and social impacts, as well as its relationship with stunting. The activity was carried out by the thematic community service team of Universitas Katolik Indonesia Santu Paulus Ruteng on Thursday, 23 July 2026 at SMA Negeri 4 Lamba Leda Utara, East Manggarai, involving 70 students. The method was health counseling through an interactive lecture followed by discussion and question-and-answer sessions, and data were collected through observation and documentation. The observations showed that students participated enthusiastically and actively in the discussion, indicating that the material was well received. Knowledge improvement was not measured quantitatively. School-based education can serve as an initial step in preventing early marriage and stunting and should be followed by knowledge assessment and continuous mentoring.

Keywords: Education; Early Marriage; Adolescents; Stunting; Community Service

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INTRODUCTION

The adolescent phase is a crucial developmental stage in human life because during this stage, individuals experience various rapid changes. These changes are not only related to physical growth but also include psychological, social, emotional, intellectual, and reproductive development (Kanji et al., 2024). adolescence is a transitional period from childhood to adulthood marked by various physical, emotional, and psychological changes (Sagalova et al., 2021). also explains that adolescents experience rapid physical, psychological, and intellectual development. Mutmainah et al. (Khan et al., 2024) view adolescence as a transitional period of mental, physical, and reproductive development that can affect general health status. Thus, adolescence is a period that requires attention and guidance so that various changes that occur can be directed positively. At this stage, special education is also needed for adolescents to overcome problems such as early marriage. Therefore, education is needed for adolescents. In Indonesia itself, this problem is very complex. The Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in its 2024 Indonesian Youth Statistics revealed that 21.49% of Indonesians married under the age of 18, or child marriage. 18.55% of young people had their first marriage in the 16-18 age group, and 2.39 percent had their first marriage under the age of 16. These data indicate that Indonesia has a fairly serious problem related to early marriage. Research by Hidayat (Meliati & Sundayani, 2021) revealed that early marriage remains a topic of debate in Indonesia because young couples tend to face the risk of divorce due to their psychological instability (Pokorn & Mikolič Južnič, 2020). The problem of stunting is also caused by early marriage, which contributes to the birth of babies at risk of stunting. Early marriage is a social problem with multidimensional effects, including the risk of stunting in children, which is also accompanied by low legal awareness in society, Putri et al., (Bugis, 2021). Early marriage in adolescence is also a contributing factor to stunting. The unstable mental condition of adolescence and also biologically related to physical conditions are highly discouraged for marriage. Several regions in Indonesia experience the same problem, one of which is NTT. NTT Province is one of the provinces with a fairly high stunting rate (Novita & Ismail, 2022).

Given the various factors that contribute to early marriage, initial steps are needed to anticipate the rise in early marriage in Indonesia. Education is a simple and crucial way to provide the primary foundation for adolescents to gain knowledge. Furthermore, reproductive health and sex education is needed early in schools, as it is considered taboo in Indonesia, even though early education is crucial as a way to prevent early marriage. Adolescents are at the forefront of breaking the chain of stunting. Recognizing the importance of this role, the Thematic Community Service Team of the Catholic University of Indonesia, St. Paul, Ruteng, held an educational activity at SMA Negeri 4 Lamba Leda Utara, East Manggarai, to equip students with knowledge about the dangers of early marriage (Millenia et al., 2022). This activity was conducted at SMA 4 Lamba Leda Utara, considering the school's permission and support, as well as the lack

of education regarding early marriage. This served as the primary basis for implementing this education program for students at the high school (Basuki et al., 2022).

The objectives of this activity are: To increase the knowledge of SMA Negeri 4 Lamba Leda Utara students regarding early marriage and its impacts on health, psychology, and social well-being. To increase students' understanding of the relationship between early marriage and the risk of stunting in children born. To equip students with basic or crucial knowledge about reproductive health and also to raise awareness and the role of adolescents as agents or the frontline in efforts to prevent early marriage and stunting in the school and community environment (Sultana & Salam, 2017).

METHOD

This stunting education activity was held on Thursday, July 23, 2026, at SMAN 4 Lamba Leda Utara, East Manggarai, NTT, as part of the Thematic Community Service Program (KKN) activities of the Catholic University of Indonesia, Santu Paulus Ruteng. The target of this activity was 70 students of SMA 4 Lamba Leda Utara. This group was chosen because adolescents are in a period of change or transition from childhood to adulthood which is marked by physical, emotional, and psychological changes, so they need adequate guidance and knowledge, Lukmana & Yuniarti (2017).

This activity used a health education method in the form of counseling with an interactive lecture followed by discussion and a question and answer session. Health education is very important because it is an effort to convey information and understanding so that individuals or certain groups are able to make decisions and behave healthily (Walker, 2012). Lectures were chosen because they are effective in conveying information to groups in a short time. Discussion and question and answer sessions were added to actively engage students and allow them to ask questions about things they do not understand well. The method was implemented throughout the educational activity and the students were very enthusiastic. The implementation of this educational activity was also divided into three stages. The first stage involved coordination and obtaining permission from the principal, developing materials, and preparing educational media. The material covered the definition and causes of early marriage, its impact on health, and its relationship to stunting. The implementation stage included an opening, presentation by the presenter, and a question-and-answer discussion with students. The closing stage included confirmation, conclusions, and documentation (Khan et al., 2024). Data was collected through observations of student participation and responses during the activity, such as activeness, questions, and responses, as well as through documentation (Scott et al., 2021) This activity did not use quantitative knowledge measurements, such as pre-tests and post-tests.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of Activities

The early marriage prevention education activity was held on Thursday, July 23, 2026, at SMA Negeri 4 Lamba Leda Utara and attended by 70 students. The event was opened by the team, followed by a presentation covering the definition and causes of early marriage, its impact on health, and its relationship to stunting. After the presentation, students were given the opportunity to discuss and ask questions. The activity concluded with a reaffirmation of the material, drawing conclusions, and documenting the findings. This sequence corresponds to the three stages outlined in the methods section: preparation, implementation, and closing (Permatasari, 2016).

Interactive lectures were chosen as the primary method because they align with the goals of health education. According to Notoatmodjo (Yoosefi Lebni et al., 2023) health education is an effort to convey information and understanding to individuals or groups so they can make healthy decisions and behave in a healthy manner. In this activity, lectures are used to convey the core material to a large number of students in a short time, while discussion and question-and-answer sessions provide a space for students to ask questions about things they don't understand.

Student Response and Participation

Based on the team's observations during the activity, the students enthusiastically participated in the series of events. They listened attentively to the presentations and participated in the discussion sessions. This indicates that the issue of early marriage is close to the lives of teenagers, easily capturing their attention. A similar response was reported by Vernanda et al. (Batyra & Pesando, 2021) during the Community Service Program (KKN) activities in Garahan Village, Jember. Students from several schools there listened enthusiastically, criticized the material, and boldly asked questions about unclear aspects, leading the implementation team to assess that the information was well absorbed (Putri et al., 2025).

However, this activity did not use pre- and post-tests, so student engagement can only be interpreted as an initial indication that the material was well-received. This engagement cannot yet be used as evidence of measurable knowledge gains.

Understanding Early Marriage, Its Causes and Impacts

Early marriage can be understood as marriage undertaken before a person is physically, mentally, and socially ready. From a legal perspective, Law Number 16 of 2019 stipulates that marriage is only permitted if the prospective bride and groom are 19 years old. This age should be understood as a minimum limit, not the most ideal benchmark of readiness. Khasanah et al. (2024) showed that in the Special Region of Yogyakarta, a program was campaigned to increase the marriage age, namely 21 years

for women and 25 years for men, because at that age a person is considered more ready in terms of health and emotional maturity (Acharya & Scott, 2022). The causes of early marriage are not isolated. Vernanda et al. (2023) found that patriarchal culture, the perceived lack of education for girls, hopes for economic improvement, and minimal education from families and schools contribute to early marriage. Putri et al. (Musa et al., 2021) added that low public legal awareness also plays a role. Understanding these various causes is important so students can recognize the pressures they may face in their own communities. The impacts of early marriage also encompass many aspects. From a health perspective, pregnancy at too young an age increases the risk of complications, such as anemia, preeclampsia, hemorrhage, and premature birth (Berliana et al., 2018) Psychologically and socially, young couples who are emotionally unstable are more vulnerable to conflict and even divorce (Hidayat, 2025; Khasanah et al., 2024). Furthermore, young families generally lack economic stability, making it difficult to meet household needs (Meliati & Sundayani, 2021).

The Relationship Between Early Marriage and Stunting

Early marriage is linked to stunting through several pathways. First, the biological pathway. Pregnant adolescents are still growing, so their nutritional intake must be divided between their own body's needs and the needs of the fetus. Damaris et al. (2025) illustrated this through a demonstration of two gallons of water filled with equal amounts of water but divided among different parties, allowing students to see firsthand how malnutrition can occur. Second, the economic pathway (Alhamuddin et al., 2020). Couples who marry too young are often financially unstable, making it difficult to meet children's nutritional needs and increasing the risk of stunting (Khasanah et al., 2024). Third, the parenting pathway. Parents' unstable emotions and a lack of diverse food choices due to economic constraints can disrupt children's growth and development (Vernanda et al., 2023). Research findings from various countries also support this link. Efevbera et al. (2017) identified child marriage as a risk factor for stunting in toddlers in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Fall et al. (2015) examined the relationship between maternal age at birth and child outcomes into adulthood in five low- and middle-income countries, demonstrating that maternal age is a significant factor in the health of the next generation. Nationally, stunting prevalence has declined to 19.8% by 2024 (Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia, 2025), but East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) remains a province with high stunting rates. Therefore, educating adolescents is an appropriate first step. Adolescents who understand the risks are expected to delay marriage and help disseminate information to their peers and family.

Reproductive Health Education in Schools

Discussions about marriage and reproductive health in schools are still often considered taboo. Khasanah et al. (2024) reported that in their partner school, sex education materials were once discontinued due to community support and opposition. This situation is similar to that described in the introduction to this article. Therefore, the

material should be delivered using polite and age-appropriate language, emphasizing the impact on students' health and future, and preferably with teacher supervision. This guidance is crucial because adolescents are in a transitional period and require guidance to effectively navigate the changes they experience (Wahyuni et al., 2023)

Limitations and Follow-up

This activity has several limitations. First, there was no quantitative measurement of knowledge, so improvements in student understanding cannot be statistically proven. Second, the activity was conducted only once in one school, so the results cannot be generalized. Third, the data, in the form of observations and documentation, relied heavily on the team's observations. Damaris et al. (Bugis, 2021) also caution that single-time education tends to increase knowledge in the short term, while lasting behavioral change requires repeated interventions and social support (Febrian et al., 2023). Given these limitations, future similar activities should include pre- and post-tests, use more interactive media such as demonstrations or educational games, and involve teachers, parents, and local health workers (Baranyanan et al., 2024). Regular mentoring is also needed to help students develop knowledge into attitudes and behaviors that support the prevention of early marriage and stunting.

CONCLUSION

The educational activity on early marriage prevention at SMA Negeri 4 Lamba Leda Utara on Thursday, July 23, 2026, attended by 70 students, went smoothly. Through interactive lectures, discussions, and questions and answers, students learned about the definition and causes of early marriage, its impacts on health, psychology, and social life, and its relationship to the risk of stunting in children. Based on team observations, students participated enthusiastically and actively in the discussion sessions, indicating that the material was well-received and relevant to them. However, this activity did not measure knowledge gains quantitatively, so its success can only be assessed through observation and documentation. For future activities, it is recommended to measure knowledge through pre- and post-tests, utilize more interactive media, and involve teachers, parents, and health workers.

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