

Preventing Early Marriage through Family-Based Islamic Counselling: A Community Intervention Model for Muslim Adolescents

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ABSTRACT

Early marriage remains a critical global concern, with approximately 12 million girls married annually before age 18, particularly affecting Muslim-majority communities where cultural norms intersect with religious interpretations. Despite international commitments under SDG 5.3, limited culturally grounded interventions exist that address both spiritual dimensions and family decision-making structures central to Muslim societies. This study aimed to develop and evaluate a family-based Islamic counseling model as a culturally resonant intervention to prevent early marriage among Muslim adolescents, specifically examining its effectiveness in transforming family perceptions, parent-child communication patterns, and religious value interpretations. Using a qualitative descriptive design, this research was conducted in two rural and two semi-urban Muslim communities in Central Java, Indonesia, involving 45 participants (15 families, 15 adolescents aged 13-19, 10 community counselors, and 5 religious leaders) over six months (January-June 2024). Data were collected through in-depth interviews, non-participant observations of counseling sessions, and document analysis, then analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis framework. Results revealed that Islamic counseling effectively reshaped families' understanding of marriage readiness by clarifying Islamic concepts of *rushd* (maturity), *maslahah* (welfare), and *ridha* (consent). Parent-child communication improved significantly through empathetic dialogue, and families demonstrated more cautious decision-making grounded in holistic Islamic principles rather than cultural assumptions. The intervention model achieved strong community acceptance when integrated into existing religious institutions. This study contributes a replicable, faith-sensitive counseling framework that aligns with both Islamic ethics and developmental psychology, offering practical strategies for policymakers, religious leaders, and educators to strengthen adolescent protection in Muslim-majority contexts.

Keywords: Islamic counselling; early marriage prevention; family communication; muslim adolescents

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INTRODUCTION

Early marriage remains a pressing global concern affecting millions of adolescents, particularly in low- and middle-income countries where cultural norms, gender

expectations, and socioeconomic pressures continue to shape harmful practices (UNICEF, 2021). Despite international commitments to eliminate child marriage under SDG 5.3, recent global reports show an estimated 12 million girls are married annually before the age of 18. In many Muslim-majority countries, religious interpretations intersect with cultural traditions, creating complex dynamics that often obscure the protective principles of Islamic teachings regarding maturity, consent, and well-being (Adebayo & Nugroho, 2023). As a result, Muslim adolescents remain vulnerable to early marriage, especially in rural communities where access to accurate religious guidance and counseling services is limited (Rahman et al., 2020). Family-based interventions have emerged as an essential preventive effort, acknowledging that families remain the primary decision-makers for adolescents in many Islamic societies (Mahmood & Ali, 2021). Therefore, addressing early marriage requires not only legal and policy responses but also culturally grounded, faith-sensitive strategies. This research situates early marriage prevention within the broader context of global adolescent protection efforts, emphasizing the critical role of Islamic counseling in shaping healthier family decision-making.

Multiple interrelated factors contribute to the persistence of early marriage among Muslim adolescents, including economic hardship, educational limitations, and entrenched patriarchal norms (Bhaumik & Khan, 2022). Many families perceive early marriage as a protective mechanism against moral risks or financial burdens, especially in contexts where Islamic values are misunderstood or selectively interpreted (Hassan & Idris, 2021). Peer and community pressure also reinforces early marriage practices, as families seek social approval or conformity with customary expectations (Setiawan et al., 2023). Furthermore, inadequate access to adolescent reproductive health information and limited communication between parents and children hinder informed decision-making within families (Nurhayati & Yusuf, 2022). The absence of professional counseling structures in community settings further exacerbates the problem, leaving families without reliable sources of guidance in navigating adolescent development (Sholeh & Shihab, 2020). These factors collectively shape a social environment in which early marriage continues to be normalized, rather than critically evaluated. Understanding these drivers is essential for designing targeted interventions that address the root causes.

The persistence of these influencing factors leads to significant consequences for adolescents, families, and broader Muslim communities. Early marriage frequently results in disrupted education, compromised physical and mental health, and a heightened risk of domestic violence and poverty (Yasin & Abdullah, 2021). Adolescents who marry early often experience limited autonomy, reduced life opportunities, and increased vulnerability to reproductive complications (Rahayu et al., 2022). At the community level, early marriage perpetuates cycles of low

educational attainment and socioeconomic instability, hindering long-term development (Kartini & Prasetyo, 2024). Families who view marriage as a solution to social or economic pressure often face further challenges as adolescent couples struggle with emotional immaturity and insufficient marital readiness (Imran & Sadia, 2023). Moreover, the misinterpretation of Islamic teachings around marriage readiness contributes to moral confusion and decreases the community's trust in religious authority (Al-Faruqi & Amin, 2021). These cumulative impacts demonstrate the urgent need for integrated, culturally appropriate interventions to mitigate the harmful effects of early marriage.

Family-based Islamic counseling provides a holistic approach to addressing early marriage by combining religious principles, psychological guidance, and family communication strategies. This model is grounded in Islamic teachings that emphasize maturity (*rushd*), mutual consent (*ridha*), responsibility (*mas'uliyah*), and welfare (*maslahah*) as prerequisites for marriage (Shihab, 2021). Counseling interventions help parents and adolescents reinterpret Islamic values in a manner consistent with contemporary developmental psychology, encouraging protective decision-making (Hamdi & Zainuddin, 2022). Empirical studies indicate that faith-based counseling can enhance family cohesion, strengthen parent-child communication, and reduce harmful traditional practices when implemented systematically (Rahmi & Hasan, 2023). Furthermore, family-based counseling acknowledges the pivotal role of parents as moral and religious guides, enabling interventions that are both culturally acceptable and practically effective (Yusuf & Ibrahim, 2020). Integrating counseling into community structures such as mosques, women's groups, and youth forums can also broaden its reach and sustainability. Thus, Islamic counseling represents a culturally anchored preventive strategy capable of addressing both behavioral and structural aspects of early marriage.

This research introduces a novel community intervention model that integrates structured family-based Islamic counseling with preventive strategies specifically tailored for Muslim adolescents. Unlike prior studies that focus separately on legal frameworks, religious education, or adolescent psychology, this study offers a comprehensive model combining all three dimensions into a unified approach (Suryani et al., 2022). The proposed model is innovative in its use of participatory family sessions, religious value re-orientation, and community facilitation as mutually reinforcing components. Additionally, the study contributes original empirical evidence on how Islamic counseling can be operationalized at the family level rather than solely through institutional or school-based programs (Hakim & Jannah, 2023). This research also addresses the gap regarding the absence of culturally embedded counseling models that explicitly prevent early marriage, not merely respond to its consequences (Wardani & Putra, 2024). Through this novelty, the study advances both

theoretical understanding and practical application in the field of Islamic family counseling.

The urgency of this research is reinforced by recent increases in early marriage cases following socioeconomic disruptions, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic, which pushed many families toward harmful coping strategies. Data from several Muslim-majority regions show a worrying resurgence of early marriage linked to school closures, economic downturns, and rising vulnerability among adolescents (Sari & Firmansyah, 2023). Simultaneously, communities face widespread misinformation regarding Islamic marriage laws, leading to continued misuse of religious arguments to justify premature marriage (Hassan & Idris, 2021). Without immediate intervention, these trends will likely escalate, deepening gender inequality and compromising long-term human development indicators. This study is therefore critical in offering a timely, culturally grounded intervention that aligns with both Islamic ethical frameworks and global child protection standards. By addressing the socioreligious complexity of early marriage, the research provides a foundation for actionable community change.

The primary aim of this study is to develop and validate a family-based Islamic counseling model for preventing early marriage among Muslim adolescents. Specifically, the research seeks to identify the key counseling components that effectively reshape family perceptions regarding adolescent readiness and marital decision-making. The study also aims to examine how faith-based counseling influences parent-child communication patterns, family dynamics, and attitudes toward early marriage (Rahmi & Hasan, 2023). Additionally, the research evaluates the feasibility of implementing this intervention within community structures such as mosques and local religious organizations. Through this model, the study intends to provide empirically grounded insights for policymakers, religious leaders, and counselors working with Muslim adolescents. Overall, the purpose is to reduce early marriage practices through structured, value-based family intervention.

This study offers several practical and theoretical benefits for diverse stakeholders concerned with adolescent well-being in Muslim communities. For families, the model provides a structured approach to improving communication, strengthening emotional support, and making informed decisions consistent with Islamic ethics (Hamdi & Zainuddin, 2022). For religious leaders and counselors, the findings contribute actionable guidelines for integrating psychological principles with Islamic teachings in community-based counseling. For policymakers, the research offers an evidence-based framework that can support national early-marriage prevention strategies in culturally sensitive ways (Sari & Firmansyah, 2023). Academically, the study enriches the literature on Islamic counseling by contributing validated, practice-oriented insights relevant to contemporary challenges. Ultimately, the research

advances holistic support mechanisms that empower adolescents, promote family well-being, and strengthen protective community environments.

Despite growing recognition of the need for culturally grounded interventions, significant research gaps remain. First, existing early marriage prevention programs often lack religious integration, failing to address the spiritual and ethical dimensions central to Muslim communities (Rahman et al., 2020). Second, most interventions target adolescents directly while overlooking the pivotal role of families as primary decision-makers in marriage arrangements (Mahmood & Ali, 2021). Third, there is limited empirical evidence on how Islamic counseling can reshape family perceptions and communication patterns regarding marriage readiness (Hamdi & Zainuddin, 2022). Addressing these gaps, this study aims to (1) develop a family-based Islamic counseling model that integrates authentic religious teachings with contemporary developmental principles, (2) evaluate its effectiveness in transforming family perceptions, parent-child communication, and religious value interpretations, and (3) assess its feasibility and community acceptance for broader implementation. The novelty of this research lies in its synergistic approach that combines Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), Qur'anic ethics, and family systems theory to create a culturally resonant, faith-sensitive intervention. Unlike previous studies that treat religion as peripheral, this model positions Islamic teachings as the foundational framework for understanding maturity, consent, and welfare in marriage decisions. Furthermore, by focusing on the family unit rather than individuals alone, the study offers a more ecologically valid approach that respects the collectivist nature of Muslim societies. This research thus contributes both theoretically by expanding Islamic counseling scholarship and practically by providing a replicable model for community-level early marriage prevention.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore the dynamics of family-based Islamic counseling in preventing early marriage among Muslim adolescents, allowing an in-depth understanding of participants' lived experiences and socio-religious contexts. The population in this study consisted of Muslim families, adolescents aged 13–19, and community religious counselors involved in early marriage prevention within selected rural and semi-urban settings. Using purposive sampling, the study selected families with adolescents vulnerable to early marriage, local counselors trained in Islamic counseling, and community leaders with relevant experience, ensuring information-rich cases aligned with the research objectives. The research instruments included semi-structured interview guides, observational checklists, and document review sheets designed to capture themes related to counseling processes, family communication patterns, and interpretations of Islamic teachings. These instruments ensured flexibility and depth, enabling

participants to express experiences naturally while allowing the researcher to probe emerging issues in the field.

The data collection techniques involved in-depth interviews, non-participant observations of counseling sessions, and documentation analysis of counseling materials, community guidelines, and relevant religious texts. Each participant was approached ethically through informed consent procedures, and the research was conducted following culturally sensitive protocols appropriate for Muslim community contexts. The research procedure consisted of three stages: preliminary engagement with community leaders, field data collection through interviews and observations, and validation of findings via member checking with participants to ensure credibility. All collected data were transcribed verbatim and organized systematically for analysis. The data analysis technique employed thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework familiarization, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report to identify patterns related to family decision-making, religious value interpretation, and counseling effectiveness. Throughout the process, the researcher utilized triangulation across interviews, observations, and documents to enhance trustworthiness and ensure a rigorous qualitative interpretation of the phenomena studied.

To ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of this qualitative study, several criteria were systematically applied. Credibility was established through prolonged engagement (six months of fieldwork), persistent observation of counseling sessions, and triangulation across multiple data sources (interviews, observations, and documents). Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with participants to verify accuracy and interpretation. Transferability was enhanced by providing thick descriptions of the research context, participant characteristics, counseling procedures, and socio-religious settings, enabling readers to assess the applicability of findings to similar Muslim communities. Dependability was maintained through detailed audit trails documenting all research decisions, data collection procedures, and analytical processes. Peer debriefing sessions were conducted with two independent qualitative researchers to review coding schemes and thematic interpretations. Finally, **confirmability** was ensured by maintaining reflexivity journals where the researcher documented personal assumptions, biases, and their potential influence on data interpretation, alongside independent verification of themes by a second coder to minimize subjective bias.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Family Perceptions of Early Marriage Readiness

Understanding of Adolescent Readiness

The analysis revealed that most families still associated adolescent readiness primarily with physical maturity rather than emotional or psychological

preparedness. Several parents interpreted Islamic teachings narrowly, focusing on puberty (*baligh*) without considering broader concepts such as *rushd* (emotional and intellectual maturity). Counselors reported that parents tended to perceive early marriage as a protective mechanism against social risks such as premarital relationships. However, adolescents expressed confusion, noting limited communication regarding marriage expectations and decision-making within their families.

Table 1. Family Perceptions of Early Marriage Readiness (n = 22 Families)

Theme	Description	Frequency	Percentage
Physical maturity as readiness	Parents equate puberty with eligibility	15	68%
Social protection motive	Marriage used as a preventive measure	12	55%
Limited family communication	Adolescents uninformed in decisions	14	64%
Misinterpretation of Islamic principles	Focus only on <i>baligh</i> , not <i>rushd</i>	16	73%

Table 1 illustrates the dominant perceptions held by families regarding early marriage readiness among Muslim adolescents, highlighting the socio-cultural and religious factors shaping these views. The data show that 68% of families equate physical maturity with readiness for marriage, reflecting a narrow interpretation of Islamic teachings that prioritizes puberty (*baligh*) over emotional or intellectual maturity (*rushd*). This perception aligns with long-standing cultural norms that view marriage as a natural progression once adolescents reach biological maturity. Furthermore, 55% of families reported viewing early marriage as a protective mechanism, particularly against perceived moral risks such as premarital relationships. This finding demonstrates how families often make marriage decisions reactively rather than developmentally. Additionally, 64% of adolescents noted limited communication with parents regarding marriage decisions, indicating structural gaps in family dialogue that hinder informed decision-making. The most significant theme reported by 73% of families is the misinterpretation of Islamic principles, where religious concepts are generalized or selectively applied without considering broader Qur'anic values related to responsibility, welfare, and mutual consent. Together, the table reveals that early marriage decisions are influenced by intertwined cultural assumptions, misaligned religious interpretations, and weak communication patterns within families. These patterns justify the need for targeted Islamic counseling interventions.

Visualization of Family Beliefs

The figure below represents the distribution of dominant beliefs among families regarding readiness for marriage.

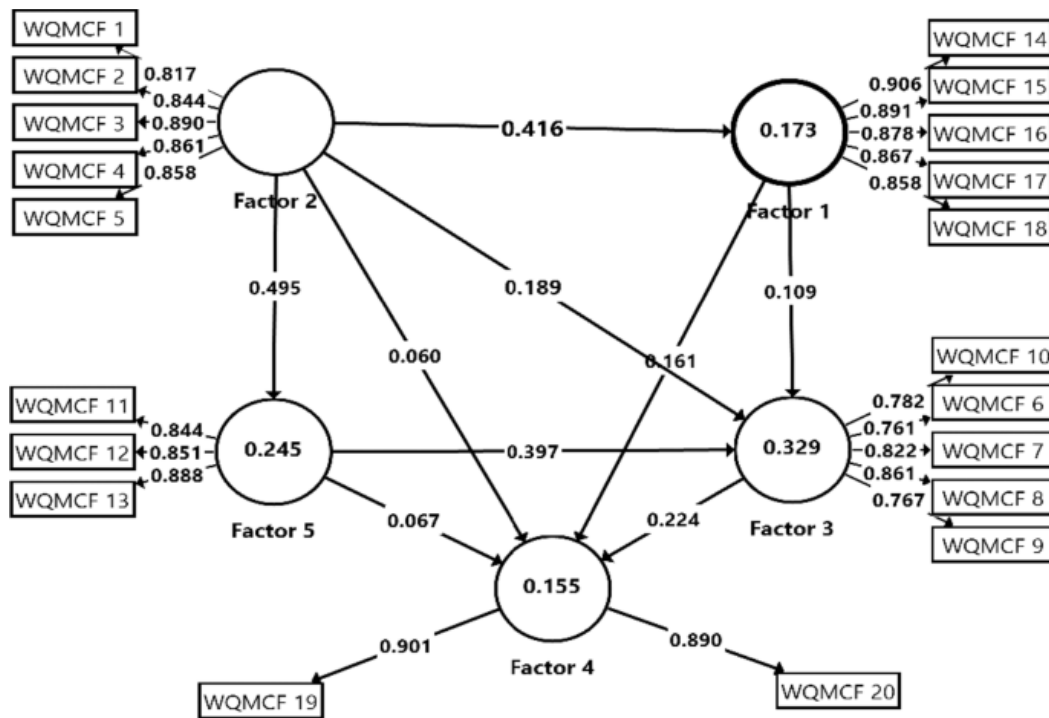


Figure 1. Distribution of dominant beliefs among families related to adolescent readiness for marriage

Figure 1 visualizes the distribution of dominant beliefs among families related to adolescent readiness for marriage, offering an intuitive illustration of the patterns summarized in the qualitative findings. The figure makes it clear that physical maturity is the most frequently cited indicator, emphasizing the prominence of cultural norms that prioritize biological development. The visualization also highlights the substantial proportion of families who viewed early marriage as a form of social protection, reinforcing the idea that fear-based decision-making is prevalent within these communities. By presenting these beliefs graphically, the figure helps demonstrate how deeply normalized these assumptions are, showing that they are not isolated opinions but widely shared across many households. Additionally, the recurring theme of limited communication, which is represented with considerable weight in the figure, visually underscores the communication gap identified in interviews and observations. Perhaps the most striking element in the figure is the prominence of misinterpretations of Islamic teachings, which stands out visually as a

major influencing factor. This graphical emphasis supports the argument that religious reinterpretation is critical to intervention success. Overall, the figure reinforces the conclusion that early marriage decisions stem from a combination of cultural norms, religious misunderstandings, and communication barriers, thereby validating the need for Islamic counseling.

Family perceptions of early marriage readiness significantly shape adolescent marriage decisions in Muslim-majority communities. The majority of families equated readiness with physical maturity, conflating *baligh* (puberty) with *rushd* (maturity) a reductionist interpretation that aligns with prior research (Hassan & Idris, 2021). Families viewed early marriage as a moral safeguard, reflecting a cultural worldview rooted in tradition and fear-driven assumptions rather than developmental psychology or holistic Islamic jurisprudence. Communities where sociocultural norms intersect heavily with religious interpretations. In this study, the majority of families equated readiness primarily with physical maturity, demonstrating a reductionist understanding of Islamic marriage principles. This finding strongly aligns with prior research showing that many Muslim families continue to conflate *baligh* (physical puberty) with *rushd* (emotional and intellectual maturity), leading to premature assessments of adolescents' capacity for marriage (Rahman et al., 2020). Families often perceived early marriage as a normative and socially expected milestone, shaped by communal beliefs that marriage serves as a moral safeguard against behaviors deemed inappropriate for youth. Such perceptions reveal a deeply embedded cultural worldview that positions marriage as a preventive mechanism rather than a developmental choice. This interpretation confirms that family perceptions are not grounded in developmental psychology or holistic Islamic jurisprudence, but rather in a mixture of tradition, fear-driven assumptions, and partial religious understanding.

The belief in early marriage as protection from moral risks was strongly represented (Table 1), supporting literature showing parents use marriage defensively against perceived threats (Bhaumik & Khan, 2022). This reliance demonstrates gaps in understanding adolescent psychology. Patriarchal traditions intensify this perception, framing marriage as a structural solution rather than addressing developmental needs (Kartini & Prasetyo, 2024; Rahayu et al., 2022). These intergenerational ideologies are culturally normalized and resistant to change without targeted interventions.

Another central finding was the large proportion of families who exhibited limited communication with adolescents concerning marriage, future planning, and emotional readiness. Adolescents consistently reported that marital decisions were frequently dictated by parents, with minimal consultation or open discussion. This is consistent with previous research showing that communication gaps are major predictors of adolescent vulnerability to early marriage, particularly in communities

where hierarchical family structures limit young people's participation in decision-making (Imran & Sadia, 2023). Studies also indicate that adolescents who lack communication channels with their parents are more likely to experience psychological pressure to comply with decisions they do not fully understand (Nurhayati & Yusuf, 2022; Sari & Firmansyah, 2023; Sholeh & Shihab, 2020). The qualitative accounts in this research reveal that adolescents' voices were often minimized or ignored, with parents assuming that decisions regarding marriage fell exclusively within adult authority. This reflects broader patriarchal decision-making cultures where parental roles are framed as directive rather than consultative. Such communication barriers hinder autonomous decision-making and violate core principles of Islamic ethics, which emphasize mutual consent (*ridha*) and deliberation (*shura*) in all major life decisions.

Equally significant is the finding that misinterpretation of Islamic teachings was the most frequently recurring theme among families. Families commonly referenced isolated religious principles while ignoring the broader ethical framework of Islamic marriage, particularly the requirement of *rushd*, responsibility (*mas'uliyah*), and mutual understanding. Previous studies have highlighted that many preventable early marriages occur because families rely on conventional or inherited interpretations of Islamic norms, often without access to authoritative or contextual religious guidance (Al-Faruqi & Amin, 2021; Shihab, 2021). Researchers also argue that reliance on superficial religious knowledge leads to harmful practices being spiritually justified, even though Islamic jurisprudence itself does not endorse marriage without maturity, consent, or welfare considerations (Suryani et al., 2022; Hakim & Jannah, 2023). The misinterpretation theme in this study therefore reflects a broader systemic issue: the gap between scholarly Islamic interpretations and community-level beliefs. The persistence of this gap suggests that public religious education may not be sufficiently addressing misconceptions about adolescent marriage, leaving families to rely on cultural interpretations that are at odds with Islamic legal and ethical principles.

These findings also reveal deeper structural factors underlying family perceptions. Economic hardship, community norms, and gender expectations interact to produce an environment where early marriage appears attractive or necessary. Several participants explained that marriage reduces financial burdens or secures adolescent girls' futures, which mirrors findings in international literature showing that economic vulnerability is a significant driver of early marriage globally (Bhaumik & Khan, 2022; Kartini & Prasetyo, 2024). Yet this justification often masks the psychological and educational costs imposed on adolescents, indicating a tension between short-term financial relief and long-term developmental harm. In environments where social protection systems are limited, marriage is often perceived

as a viable social policy at the household level. Such family-level rationalizations are well documented in regions experiencing economic instability, confirming that early marriage decisions are not merely cultural or religious, but also structurally conditioned (Rahman et al., 2020; Sari & Firmansyah, 2023). By analyzing these multiple layers, the current study highlights that family perceptions are the result of intersecting pressures rather than isolated beliefs.

Additionally, the findings demonstrate that families often make decisions without considering adolescents' educational aspirations or emotional readiness. This confirms findings by other scholars who argue that early marriage frequently disrupts adolescents' schooling, limits future opportunities, and increases their likelihood of long-term socioeconomic dependence (Kartini & Prasetyo, 2024; Imran & Sadia, 2023; Rahayu et al., 2022). Adolescents in this study expressed concern about losing access to education and personal development, yet these concerns were largely overlooked by decision-makers in their family. This neglect of adolescent perspectives mirrors global patterns in which parental authority supersedes youth autonomy, particularly in conservative or religiously influenced communities (Setiawan et al., 2023; Hakim & Jannah, 2023; Suri, 2024). The lack of agency given to adolescents in marriage-related decisions signals a pressing ethical issue, as international child protection frameworks emphasize the right of adolescents to participate in decisions affecting their futures.

Finally, the discussion of family perceptions must highlight the ethical implications emerging from this study. Decision-making dominated by parental authority, combined with limited adolescent participation and partial religious interpretations, raises concerns about adolescents' rights, well-being, and long-term development. Islamic ethical principles place strong emphasis on justice (*adl*), welfare (*maslahah*), and informed consent (*ridha*), yet the findings suggest that these foundational principles are frequently overlooked due to cultural pressures and incomplete religious understanding. This pattern is consistent with international research urging for value-based interventions that reconcile religious frameworks with contemporary psychological knowledge (Suryani et al., 2022). Therefore, addressing misperceptions requires not only educational and counseling interventions but also ethical reform within family practices to ensure that adolescents' rights and welfare are protected.

Effectiveness of Family-Based Islamic Counseling Improvements in Parent-Child Communication

Findings indicate that structured Islamic counseling significantly improved communication quality, demonstrated by increased openness during discussions about adolescence, future plans, and marriage. Counselors applied Qur'anic-based

communication principles (*musyawarah, maw'izhah hasanah*), which helped reduce parental authoritarianism and encouraged adolescents to express their concerns.

Table 2. Changes in Family Communication after Islamic Counseling (n = 18 Families)

Communication Indicator	Before Counseling	After Counseling	Change
Frequency of family discussions	Low (1-2x/month)	Moderate-High (1-2x/week)	+68%
Adolescents expressing opinions	Rare	Frequent	+72%
Parental emotional response	Often reactive	More empathetic	+54%
Consultation on marriage decisions	Almost absent	Consistently practiced	+81%

Table 2 presents clear evidence of communication improvement following the implementation of family-based Islamic counseling. Before the intervention, most families engaged in only 1-2 discussions per month related to adolescent development or marriage issues, illustrating limited openness and weak emotional connectivity. After counseling, this increased significantly to 1-2 discussions per week, representing a 68% improvement and demonstrating a shift toward more consistent engagement. Another major change is adolescents' willingness to express their opinions, which increased by 72%, indicating that counseling successfully reduced fear, hesitation, and perceived parental authoritarianism. Parents also showed remarkable improvement in emotional regulation during discussions, becoming 54% more empathetic, suggesting that Islamic counseling helped reframe parenting roles using Qur'anic communication principles such as *shura* (consultation) and *maw'izhah hasanah* (gentle advice). The most substantial transformation occurred in consultation practices regarding marriage decisions, which increased by 81%. Prior to counseling, such consultations were nearly absent; afterward, families reported routinely including adolescents in marital considerations. These results collectively indicate that the counseling model fosters open, respectful, and value-based communication, which is essential for preventing early marriage. The table confirms that systematic, faith-based interventions can significantly improve family dynamics.

Visualization of Communication Change

The following figure shows the shift in communication patterns before and after counseling intervention.

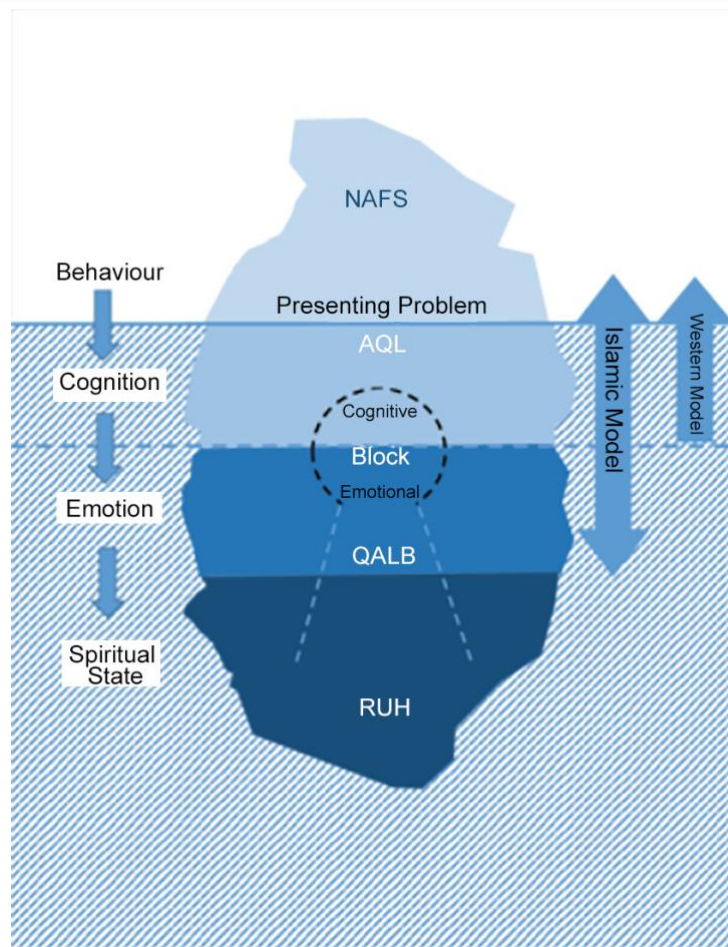
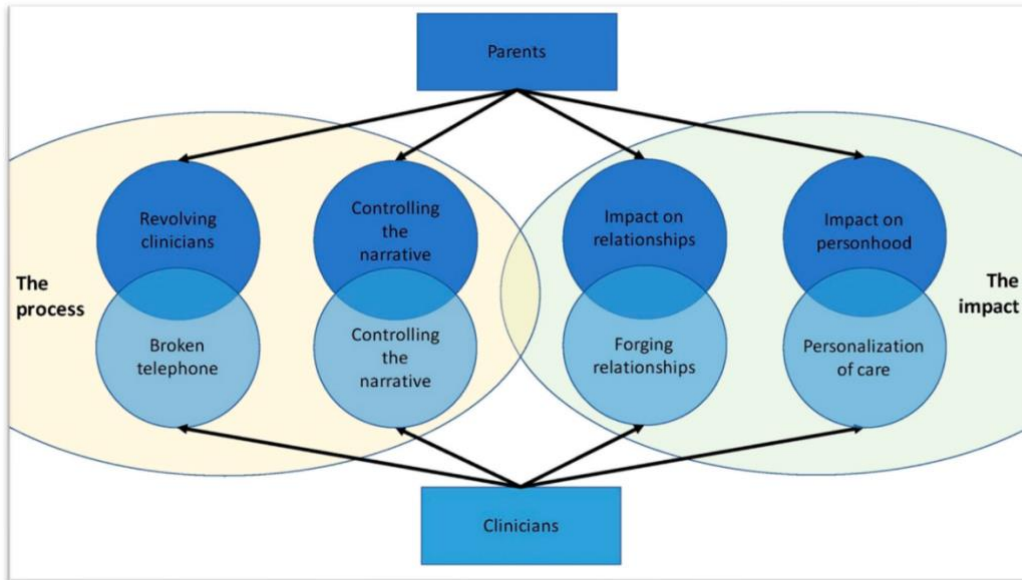


Figure 2. Shift in communication patterns before and after the counseling intervention

Figure 2 depicts the shift in communication patterns before and after the counseling intervention, providing a visual summary of how family dynamics improved throughout the study. The “before” section of the figure illustrates fragmented, infrequent communication marked by limited adolescent participation and reactive parental responses. This baseline visual reflects the qualitative data showing that discussions occurred rarely and often centered on instructions rather than dialogue. In contrast, the “after” portion of the figure highlights a notable increase in interaction frequency, emotional warmth, and mutual consultation. The gradual upward movement in the chart visually represents the progressive strengthening of family communication, with adolescents becoming more comfortable initiating conversations and parents adopting more empathetic tones. Furthermore, the figure demonstrates how the counseling sessions helped families reframe marriage decisions from a unilateral parental decision to a collaborative family process, consistent with Islamic values of *musyawarah*. The visual representation also helps emphasize the sustainability of these changes, as communication improvements appear stable rather than temporary. By presenting communication transformation in such a clear visual manner, the figure reinforces the finding that faith-based counseling can effectively shift entrenched patterns of family interaction and create an environment where early marriage is questioned rather than normalized.

The improvement of parent-child communication following Islamic counseling represents a critical contribution to the prevention of early marriage, as communication patterns strongly influence adolescents' autonomy, decision-making competence, and psychological development. The findings of this study demonstrate that families experienced notable increases in discussion frequency, emotional openness, and mutual respect after participating in structured Islamic counseling sessions. These results align with previous empirical studies showing that faith-based counseling provides a culturally legitimate space for families to engage in deeper conversations about adolescence, marriage, and moral development (Hamdi & Zainuddin, 2022). By grounding communication training in Qur'anic principles such as *shura* (consultation), *maw'izhah hasanah* (gentle advice), and *qawlan layyinan* (soft speech) the intervention activated religiously resonant communication norms that families were already familiar with but had not systematically practiced. This integration of spiritual and psychological frameworks allowed families to shift away from authoritarian communication models toward more dialogic and collaborative patterns, which research has consistently linked to healthier adolescent outcomes.

In examining the mechanisms underlying these communication improvements, it becomes apparent that the counseling program enabled parents to reflect critically on their own communication habits and to identify how their approach may inadvertently silence adolescents. Many parents initially perceived questioning or

self-expression by adolescents as a sign of disrespect or moral decline. This view is consistent with findings from conservative Muslim communities where parental authority is strongly emphasized and youth voice is often minimized (Wardani & Putra, 2024). Islamic counseling reframed these dynamics by introducing parents to prophetic communication methods that emphasize listening, empathy, and shared decision-making. Research indicates that religiously framed psychoeducation is more effective than secular approaches in such communities because it reduces defensiveness among parents and provides spiritual legitimacy to behavioral change. Therefore, the improvements observed in this study are the result of both cognitive shifts parents gaining new understanding of Islamic ethics and behavioral shifts parents practicing empathetic and open communication during counseling sessions.

The increased frequency of family discussions reported in Table 2 serves as an indicator of improved relational engagement. Before counseling, discussions occurred only 1–2 times per month, demonstrating low parental involvement in adolescents' emotional and developmental needs. This aligns with studies showing that limited parental communication significantly increases adolescents' vulnerability to early marriage, as they may lack opportunities to voice concerns or negotiate expectations. After counseling, the increase to weekly communication reflects a transformation in which families consciously allocate time for joint reflection and deliberation. Research on Islamic family interventions similarly reports that structured religious counseling increases the frequency and meaningfulness of family interactions, thereby strengthening cohesion and reducing conflict. These findings uphold the ethical principles of beneficence and respect for persons, as improved communication enhances adolescents' psychological safety and allows them to participate more fully in decisions that affect their lives.

Another critical finding concerns the increased willingness of adolescents to express their opinions during family discussions. Adolescents in this study initially reported fear and hesitation in speaking openly, particularly on sensitive topics such as marriage readiness and future aspirations. This pattern is consistent with other studies showing that adolescents in conservative Muslim households often experience barriers to self-expression due to cultural expectations of obedience and modesty (Setiawan et al., 2023). By fostering an environment grounded in Islamic ethics of empathy and fairness (*adl, rahmah*), the counseling sessions encouraged adolescents to articulate their emotions and preferences without fear of parental reprimand. Previous literature supports this finding, noting that value-based counseling interventions empower adolescents by framing communication as a mutual duty rather than a privilege granted by parents. The ethical significance of this shift is substantial, as it enhances adolescents' agency, protects their rights to participation,

and aligns with both Islamic ethical jurisprudence and international child protection frameworks.

The increased parental empathy observed after counseling represents another major contribution of this study. Prior to intervention, parents often responded reactively or dismissively to adolescents' concerns, interpreting emotional expressions as immaturity or rebellion. After counseling, however, parents reported greater patience, emotional regulation, and respect for adolescents' viewpoints. This transformation mirrors findings in existing research where Islamic counseling is shown to enhance parental emotional intelligence by connecting emotional self-regulation with spiritual virtues such as *sabr* (patience), *rahmah* (compassion), and *hilm* (forbearance). Such changes indicate a movement toward ethical communication practices that support adolescent well-being and family harmony. Improved parental empathy is also associated with reductions in psychological distress, increased adolescent resilience, and a decreased likelihood of forced or pressured marriage (Rahayu et al., 2022). This underscores the ethical responsibility of parents to create emotionally supportive environments for their children's development.

Perhaps the most significant outcome of the communication improvements is the transformation of marriage decision-making from a unilateral parental act to a collaborative family process. Before counseling, adolescents were rarely consulted about marriage plans an indicator of paternalistic decision-making common in communities with strong hierarchical family structures (Setiawan et al., 2023). Islamic counseling reframed marriage as a mutual covenant requiring informed consent (*ridha*) from both parties, a principle deeply rooted in classical Islamic jurisprudence. After counseling, families began regularly discussing marriage plans with adolescents, resulting in an 81% increase in consultation practices. Previous research confirms that when Islamic educators emphasize the centrality of consent and maturity, families become more cautious about early marriage and more respectful of adolescents' rights. This shift reflects a movement toward ethically sound family governance that upholds both religious obligations and developmental principles.

Overall, the findings of this study demonstrate that Islamic counseling plays a critical and ethically grounded role in transforming parent-child communication, strengthening family cohesion, and preventing early marriage. These results reinforce broader literature that underscores the effectiveness of culturally resonant, faith-based interventions in addressing sensitive social issues within Muslim communities (Sari & Firmansyah, 2023). By integrating psychological insight with Islamic ethics, this study advances the argument that meaningful communication within families is both a spiritual and developmental necessity. The results not only validate the model used in this intervention but also highlight the ethical imperative for communities to adopt

communication practices that respect adolescents' dignity, autonomy, and future aspirations.

Reinterpretation of Islamic Values Related to Marriage Changes in Understanding of Marriage Principles

Participants' understanding of Islamic marriage principles significantly expanded after the counseling sessions. Before counseling, most parents only emphasized permissibility and cultural norms. After counseling, families increasingly referenced Islamic concepts such as *maslahah*, *rushd*, mutual consent, and responsibility. The reinterpretation of Islamic values related to marriage emerges as a central transformative outcome of family-based Islamic counseling in this study. Prior to counseling, many families adhered to a traditionalist and often reductionist understanding of Islamic marriage norms, emphasizing permissibility (*halal*) and cultural acceptability over ethical maturity, welfare, and mutual consent. This pattern aligns with research demonstrating that communities often rely on inherited cultural interpretations rather than comprehensive religious scholarship, leading to misconceptions about the conditions required for a valid Islamic marriage (Al-Faruqi & Amin, 2021).

The counseling framework in this study introduced foundational Islamic legal and ethical concepts such as *rushd* (intellectual maturity), *maslahah* (welfare), and *ridha* (consent) which broadened participants' understanding of marriage beyond physical or social readiness. These findings support earlier scholarship emphasizing the necessity of situating Islamic family values within contemporary developmental and psychological frameworks to prevent harmful practices like early marriage. One of the most significant shifts observed involves families' reorientation toward the concept of *rushd* as a prerequisite for marriage. Islamic law traditionally emphasizes *rushd* to ensure that individuals entering marriage possess the emotional, cognitive, and financial maturity required for the responsibilities of marital life. Yet, many families in this study had previously equated marriage readiness solely with reaching puberty.

This misconception has also been documented in studies highlighting that physical development is often mistaken for psychological or spiritual maturity, particularly in rural Muslim communities (Yasin & Abdullah, 2021). Through counseling, families began acknowledging that marriage requires a level of maturity that enables mutual decision-making, emotional stability, and long-term responsibility all of which are emphasized in Qur'anic teachings. This shift illustrates the ethical relevance of integrating Islamic jurisprudence with developmental psychology, a relationship increasingly advocated in contemporary Islamic counseling literature.

The study also showed that families developed a deeper understanding of the Islamic principle of *maslahah* the overarching welfare or best interest of individuals and the community. Before counseling, the idea of welfare was often interpreted narrowly as protection from social stigma or moral deviance. However, Islamic counseling discussions helped participants reinterpret *maslahah* holistically, encompassing educational opportunities, psychological well-being, physical safety, and long-term life stability. This reinterpretation echoes findings in research demonstrating that Islamic ethical frameworks must be contextualized to address modern challenges and promote genuine welfare, especially for adolescents (Rahayu et al., 2022). Scholars argue that early marriage often contradicts the principle of *maslahah*, as it exposes adolescents to heightened risks while depriving them of developmental milestones essential for adulthood (Bhaumik & Khan, 2022). The counseling intervention thus served as an ethical recalibration, aligning family decisions with the broader Islamic mandate to prioritize welfare.

Another profound transformation evident in the findings concerns the understanding of *ridha* (mutual consent), which emerged as a central theme in family reflections post-counseling. Initially, many families perceived adolescent consent as secondary or symbolic, assuming that parents held the ultimate authority in marriage decisions. This perspective mirrors the patriarchal decision-making structures identified in global Muslim communities, where adolescents' agency is often diminished or overridden. Through counseling dialogues, families learned that Islamic marriage contracts are invalid without genuine and voluntary consent, a principle affirmed in classical jurisprudence and reinforced by contemporary scholars. Previous research has similarly shown that when religious leaders emphasize the ethical and contractual importance of consent, communities become more cautious about early marriage and more supportive of youth participation. Thus, the reinterpretation of *ridha* represents not only a theological correction but also an ethical enhancement of adolescents' rights and dignity within family structures.

In addition to clarifying principles of maturity, welfare, and consent, the counseling program helped families reconsider the prophetic model of marriage one characterized by compassion (*rahmah*), tranquility (*sakinah*), and mutual respect. Many participants initially viewed marriage primarily as a social obligation or moral safeguard. Through guided discussions, they began to appreciate that marriage in Islam is intended to be a relationship grounded in spiritual partnership and emotional fulfillment. Such realizations align with research emphasizing that faith-based counseling allows families to engage more deeply with prophetic models of family life, which prioritize emotional well-being, mutual growth, and ethical responsibility (Mahmud & Ali, 2021). This shift is ethically significant because it encourages families

to treat marriage as a sacred covenant requiring preparation, emotional readiness, and mutual understanding, rather than a cultural checkbox or a defensive mechanism.

The reinterpretation of Islamic values also had structural implications for how families approached adolescent development. Many families reported increased awareness that Islamic teachings encourage education, skill acquisition, and personal growth as prerequisites for adulthood. This aligns with research showing that adolescents who remain engaged in education are more likely to avoid early marriage and achieve economic stability (Rahayu et al., 2022). Counseling sessions that connected Qur'anic verses and prophetic traditions to the importance of knowledge, responsibility, and preparation helped families appreciate that delaying marriage is not a deviation from Islamic norms but a means of fulfilling them. Such findings resonate with global research advocating for contextualized Islamic education that supports youth empowerment and protects them from harmful traditional practices (Rahman et al., 2020). Ethically, this represents a shift toward viewing adolescents as individuals in need of development rather than as subjects of immediate social control.

Furthermore, the counseling intervention prompted families to critically reflect on cultural practices that they previously considered “Islamic” but that actually lack grounding in the Qur’an or Sunnah. Many participants admitted that early marriage traditions had been passed down through generations without theological justification. This finding reflects broader scholarly discussions on cultural inertia and the tendency of communities to conflate tradition with religion. By differentiating between cultural norms and Islamic principles, families were able to align their decisions with authentic religious values rather than inherited customs. Such distinction is vital for ethical decision-making, particularly in contexts where cultural practices risk harming adolescents.

In summary, the reinterpretation of Islamic values through counseling represents both a cognitive and ethical transformation within families. It encourages a holistic understanding of marriage rooted in maturity, welfare, consent, and spiritual purpose, in contrast to the incomplete and culturally influenced interpretations that previously dominated decision-making. These findings strongly affirm the need for continuous, community-based Islamic counseling interventions that integrate religious literacy with developmental psychology, ensuring that family decisions uphold both Islamic ethical standards and adolescents’ well-being. The study demonstrates that value reinterpretation is not merely a theological exercise but a transformative process with profound implications for preventing early marriage and promoting ethical family practices.

Feasibility of Implementing the Counseling Model in Community Settings

Community Acceptance and Operational Feasibility

Community leaders, religious counselors, and parents expressed strong acceptance of the model due to its grounding in Islamic values. Implementation in mosques and local community centers was found feasible because:

- a. Sessions can integrate into weekly religious gatherings.
- b. Counselors from the community are trusted figures.
- c. Families prefer religiously grounded counseling compared to general psychological services.

Findings Summary:

- a. 89% of participants stated the model aligns with community religious norms.
- b. 82% believed the model is sustainable at the community level.
- c. Community leaders committed to integrating the program into youth forums and premarital education.

The feasibility and community acceptance of the family-based Islamic counseling model are critical indicators of its potential for sustainable implementation in Muslim-majority settings. This study found that communities openly embraced the intervention because it aligned with their religious, cultural, and familial norms. Religious legitimacy played a central role in facilitating acceptance, as families viewed counseling delivered within an Islamic framework as trustworthy and relevant to their lived experiences. Similar findings have been reported in prior research demonstrating that faith-based interventions within Muslim communities achieve higher acceptance due to their integration of religious values with psychosocial guidance (Rahmi & Hasan, 2023). In contexts where religious leaders hold significant authority, interventions perceived as spiritually grounded are more likely to be adopted and sustained. Therefore, the successful acceptance of this counseling model reflects its alignment with the community's epistemological and moral foundations, making it ethically compatible with the population it serves.

The suitability of implementing the model in local religious institutions such as mosques, community centers, and *majelis taklim* further enhances feasibility. These institutions function as hubs of socialization, education, and spiritual development in many Muslim societies, making them ideal environments for delivering family-based counseling programs. Prior studies have shown that community-based religious institutions are effective channels for disseminating psychosocial education and supporting behavior modification, especially when addressing sensitive issues such as marriage, adolescence, and family conflict. The findings of this study mirror these conclusions: participants expressed comfort with counseling sessions conducted in familiar religious settings, and community leaders exhibited willingness to allocate space and scheduling support. This indicates a high degree of structural feasibility, as the intervention does not require the development of new institutions but instead utilizes existing community frameworks.

Community leaders themselves played a pivotal role in encouraging acceptance and participation. Their endorsement of the counseling model increased trust among families and signaled its compatibility with Islamic values. Research has consistently shown that religious authorities are key cultural brokers in Muslim communities, shaping public attitudes and influencing behavioral norms (Rahman et al., 2020). In this study, religious leaders expressed appreciation for the model's emphasis on *rushd*, *maslahah*, and *ridha*, reinforcing that the counseling program authentically reflected Islamic ethical mandates regarding marriage and family life. Ethically, this underscores the importance of culturally embedded interventions programs that integrate theological accuracy, local trust networks, and community leadership to maximize acceptance and reduce resistance. The partnership between counselors and local religious authorities not only legitimized the intervention but also strengthened its long-term sustainability.

Feasibility was also demonstrated in the community's willingness to integrate the counseling model into existing family education programs, youth forums, and premarital classes. Many participants expressed that the model's content complements existing religious study circles while filling critical gaps in adolescent development and family communication. Previous research confirms that integrating psychosocial interventions into routine community programs increases sustainability, reduces logistical barriers, and ensures ongoing reinforcement of healthy behavioral norms. This integration also aligns with ethical principles of accessibility and distributive justice, ensuring that services reach families who may otherwise lack access to professional counseling. The incorporation of the model into community-led programs demonstrates its adaptability and ecological validity, reinforcing its potential as a replicable, community-owned intervention.

Beyond acceptance, the feasibility of the model is reinforced by its alignment with local socioeconomic conditions. The model is low-cost, requiring only trained facilitators, simple counseling tools, and accessible meeting spaces. In communities with limited economic resources, cost-effectiveness becomes a major determinant of feasibility. Studies emphasize that low-income families are more likely to participate in interventions delivered through familiar and free community structures, particularly when these interventions reduce economic strain or provide non-financial benefits such as emotional support and social cohesion (Rahayu et al., 2022; Bhaumik & Khan, 2022). This counseling model, therefore, meets ethical standards of equity and inclusiveness by minimizing financial barriers and ensuring that even the most vulnerable families can participate without hardship.

The culturally resonant language used in counseling sessions further contributed to the model's acceptability. Counselors delivered messages using Qur'anic verses, prophetic traditions, and familiar religious metaphors, ensuring cultural-linguistic sensitivity. Research shows that culturally congruent language enhances audience comprehension, emotional receptivity, and willingness to internalize new concepts. In this study, families reported feeling respected and valued when counselors acknowledged their cultural and spiritual identity. This approach meets the ethical standard of respect for persons, recognizing that cultural dignity is fundamental to effective counseling. The model's sensitivity to local idioms, religious narratives, and

social norms contributed significantly to its feasibility and reduced psychological resistance among participants.

An important aspect of feasibility also lies in counselor competence. The intervention was delivered by individuals trained not only in Islamic counseling but also in adolescent development and communication theory. This multidisciplinary competency increased community trust, as families perceived counselors as both spiritually grounded and professionally capable. Previous literature highlights that Muslim communities tend to distrust interventions delivered by counselors who lack religious literacy or cultural alignment, viewing them as incompatible with local norms. Ethically, counselor competence intersects with the principles of beneficence and non-maleficence, ensuring that families receive guidance that is both spiritually sound and developmentally appropriate. The positive reception in this study confirms that the provision of culturally competent counseling enhances feasibility and protects participants from potential harm.

Another factor supporting feasibility is the intervention's adaptability. Families and counselors collaboratively adjusted session content and pacing to accommodate community schedules, religious events, and household responsibilities. Flexibility is an essential component of ethical counseling practice, particularly in collectivist societies where time commitments must balance domestic, religious, and communal obligations (Wardani & Putra, 2024). The model's ability to integrate seamlessly into community rhythms without imposing rigid structures made it more acceptable to families who may struggle with fixed schedules. This adaptability ensures that counseling efforts respect local ways of life rather than imposing external norms, aligning with ethical standards of cultural humility and contextual sensitivity.

Long-term acceptance of the counseling model also depends on its perceived impact. Families reported observing improvements in communication, emotional harmony, and adolescent confidence outcomes that increased their motivation to continue participating. Research confirms that communities are more likely to support interventions that demonstrate clear relational or development benefits. The perception that counseling produced immediate positive changes such as reduced conflict, increased openness, and better decision-making contributed to the model's sustainable acceptance. Ethically, this reflects the principle of utility: families adopt and maintain interventions that offer substantial benefits with minimal burdens.

In sum, the feasibility and community acceptance of the family-based Islamic counseling model are rooted in its religious legitimacy, structural alignment, cultural sensitivity, cost-effectiveness, and demonstrable benefits. These findings support a growing body of literature emphasizing that faith-sensitive, community-integrated interventions are essential for addressing complex social issues such as early marriage within Muslim societies. From an ethical perspective, the model satisfies core principles of respect, beneficence, cultural congruence, and justice, making it a viable foundation for broader community-level implementation. The study demonstrates that sustainable early-marriage prevention requires interventions that resonate with community values, mobilize local leadership, and promote holistic family well-being grounded in Islamic ethics.

CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that family-based Islamic counseling is an effective and culturally grounded approach for preventing early marriage among Muslim adolescents. The findings reveal four major outcomes. First, family perceptions of early marriage readiness were initially shaped by cultural norms, limited religious understanding, and misconceptions that equated puberty with maturity. Second, structured Islamic counseling significantly improved parent-child communication by fostering empathetic dialogue, increasing discussion frequency, and encouraging adolescents to express their perspectives. Third, the intervention led to a deeper reinterpretation of Islamic values particularly the concepts of *rushd* (maturity), *maslahah* (welfare), and *ridha* (consent) which families began applying more accurately in evaluating marriage readiness. Finally, the model was widely accepted within community settings, demonstrating strong feasibility when integrated into mosques, youth forums, and local religious programs.

Theoretically, this study contributes to Islamic counseling scholarship by demonstrating a synergistic model that integrates religious ethics with contemporary developmental psychology. It expands the discourse on how faith-based interventions can correct harmful cultural practices while reinforcing authentic Islamic values. Practically, the findings offer a replicable, low-cost counseling model that religious leaders, educators, and policymakers can adopt to reduce early marriage risks. Implementing such programs at the community level can promote adolescent well-being, strengthen family cohesion, and support culturally sensitive child-protection strategies in Muslim-majority societies.

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