

Service Learning in Premarital Guidance to Enhance the Religious and Psychological Readiness of Prospective Brides and Grooms

Dika Sahputra^{1*}, Firly Syahira Sihombing², Hesti Sasmita³, Putri Rahmadani Panjaitan⁴, Indah Sari⁵, Desmy Suhartika⁶, Dian Novelia Azris⁷, Hendra Pratama Sihombing⁸, Dandi Fhadillah Ritonga⁹

1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9 Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Medan City, 20371, Indonesia

Abstract. Premarital guidance plays a vital role in preparing prospective brides and grooms for marriage by enhancing their religious and psychological readiness. Integrating Service Learning into this guidance program offers an experiential and participatory approach that may improve the effectiveness of preparation. This study employed a qualitative descriptive method with a Service Learning framework, involving five pairs of prospective couples and one religious counselor at the Religious Affairs Office in Percut Sei Tuan. Data were collected through participant observation and in-depth interviews, focusing on the implementation process and its impact on couples' readiness. Findings indicate that Service Learning-based premarital guidance significantly improves couples' understanding of Islamic marriage principles and strengthens their emotional maturity and coping skills. Interactive activities and reflections promoted deeper internalization of religious values and enhanced psychological preparedness for marital challenges. The participatory nature of Service Learning fosters moral commitment and emotional resilience essential for harmonious family life. Despite challenges such as limited time and participant variability, this approach effectively combines spiritual and psychological preparation, contributing to the development of stable and fulfilling marriages.

Keywords: Service Learning; Premarital Guidance; Prospective Brides and Grooms Readiness; Religious and Psychological Preparedness; Community Service

1. Introduction

Humans are naturally created to form pairs and build family units, which is fundamental for continuing generations. Marriage, as a social and religious institution, serves as the foundation for establishing harmonious families (Batyra & Pesando, 2021; Bukido et al., 2023). According to Islamic teachings, marriage is not merely a fulfillment of biological desires but a sacred covenant aimed at achieving happiness, peace, and mutual compassion within the family (Fauzi, 2019; Kamaruzaman et al., 2018; Kharlie et al., 2021). A well-established family unit is crucial for societal welfare because the family

*Corresponding author's email: dikasahputra@uinsu.ac.id, Telp.: +6281361587943

represents the smallest unit of society. Laws and religious guidelines emphasize the importance of marriage as a means to foster a stable and prosperous household.

Despite the ideal goals of marriage, many couples face challenges in realizing a harmonious and enduring family life. Problems such as lack of religious understanding, insufficient psychological readiness, economic difficulties, and psychosocial conflicts often disturb marital harmony (Komorowska-Pudło, 2021; Smith, 2022). Inability to handle such issues may lead to divorce (AL-shahrani & Hammad, 2023; Yob et al., 2022). National statistics show a high divorce rate, reaching approximately 200,000 cases annually, accounting for around 10% of total marriages each year. Data from the Religious Court Class 1 A Medan reveals an increasing trend of divorce cases from 2020 to 2022, with a higher incidence of contested divorces initiated by wives (Mubarak et al., 2016; Nofrisa et al., 2019). One key factor contributing to divorce is the lack of religious knowledge and psychological preparedness among couples, which leads to misunderstandings and conflicts.

Although premarital guidance programs are regularly conducted by the Religious Affairs Office (KUA), many prospective couples still lack adequate understanding of religious principles and psychological readiness essential for building a sustainable marriage. Existing studies have not sufficiently explored how premarital guidance effectively shapes religious and psychological preparedness among couples, especially in the context of the Percut Sei Tuan sub-district. There is a need for empirical research focusing on the implementation and impact of premarital guidance to fill this gap.

This study is important to provide empirical insights into the process and effectiveness of premarital guidance in enhancing the religious and psychological readiness of prospective couples. The findings are expected to assist religious counselors at KUA in developing more effective guidance strategies and contribute to reducing divorce rates by strengthening couples' religious knowledge and psychological maturity. Ultimately, the study aims to support the creation of harmonious families characterized by peace, love, and compassion.

The main objectives of this study are to investigate how premarital guidance is implemented by religious counselors at the Religious Affairs Office in the Percut Sei Tuan sub-district, to evaluate the influence of this guidance on enhancing the religious and psychological readiness of prospective brides and grooms, and to offer practical recommendations for improving the premarital guidance program. By achieving these goals, the study aims to contribute to the development of more effective preparation for couples, ultimately supporting their success in building harmonious and sustainable marriages.

2. Methods

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method grounded in the principles of Service Learning. The qualitative approach was chosen to deeply understand the phenomenon of premarital guidance implementation and its impact on the religious and psychological readiness of prospective brides and grooms, through active engagement of the researcher in community service activities. This method enables the collection of direct field data and the interpretation of meanings arising from the interactions between religious counselors and the prospective couples during the guidance process.

The research process involves inductive data collection by posing open-ended questions to participants, followed by systematic and in-depth data analysis (Kohno et al.,



2020; Novelita *et al.*, 2019; Shaheen *et al.*, 2022). The study was conducted at the Religious Affairs Office in Percut Sei Tuan sub-district. The research subjects included five pairs of prospective brides and grooms participating in the premarital guidance program and one religious counselor acting as the facilitator. The study took place over one month, involving collaborative learning and interaction among the researcher, the counselor, and the prospective couples as part of the Service Learning practice.

Data were collected using participatory observation and in-depth interviews. Observation was conducted throughout the guidance sessions to monitor interaction dynamics and the implementation of the guidance material. Interviews were carried out to explore the participants' understanding and readiness regarding religious and psychological aspects after attending the guidance. Primary data were obtained directly from interviews and observations with the participants, while secondary data were gathered from relevant literature including books, national journals, and international journals. All interviews were documented using audio and video recordings to support comprehensive data analysis.

Through this Service Learning approach, the research is not only a data collection process but also an educational and community service activity, where the researcher actively supports the readiness of prospective couples by facilitating premarital guidance based on religious knowledge and psychological preparedness (Marcilla-Toribio *et al.*, 2022; Marcus *et al.*, 2020; Resch & Schrittmesser, 2023).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Implementation of Service Learning in Premarital Guidance

The premarital guidance program at the Religious Affairs Office (KUA) in Percut Sei Tuan exemplifies a progressive educational approach by integrating Service Learning to prepare prospective brides and grooms. Unlike traditional lecture-style counseling, this program actively engages couples in participatory learning activities. This shift from passive receipt of information to active involvement reflects the core philosophy of Service Learning, which combines meaningful community service with structured educational experiences.

Under the guidance of experienced religious counselors, such as Bapak Ismail, the couples engage in a variety of learning formats including group discussions, role-playing, and reflection exercises. These activities are carefully designed to help participants explore critical topics related to marriage and family life from an Islamic perspective. This interactive process encourages couples to internalize key religious values and principles rather than simply memorizing facts.

One of the key strengths of this Service Learning model is its experiential nature. Participants are invited to actively practice skills such as conflict resolution, communication, and decision-making through simulated real-life scenarios. For example, role-playing exercises mimic common marital challenges, allowing couples to rehearse constructive responses in a safe and supportive environment. This hands-on learning fosters confidence and preparedness for managing future household responsibilities.

The counselors act not just as instructors but as facilitators who encourage dialogue and mutual learning among participants. This collaborative atmosphere promotes peer support, where couples share insights and personal experiences. Such exchange deepens understanding and builds empathy, which are essential for fostering successful



partnerships. This process also aligns with the principles of Service Learning by emphasizing reciprocal benefits between learners and the community.

The sessions typically begin with a brief presentation of Islamic teachings on marriage, including rights and obligations of spouses, family ethics, and spiritual foundations. However, rather than merely delivering information, the counselors engage participants by posing open-ended questions and facilitating group reflections. This approach helps couples relate religious concepts to their personal lives and cultural contexts, making the teachings more relevant and meaningful.

In addition to the group-based activities, individual reflection is also encouraged. Participants may be asked to keep journals or write about their expectations and concerns regarding marriage. This reflective practice allows couples to process their learning internally and identify personal areas for growth. It also helps counselors tailor their guidance to meet individual needs, thus enhancing the overall effectiveness of the program.

The program's design intentionally blurs the line between education and community service. As couples prepare for marriage, they simultaneously contribute to strengthening the social fabric by promoting stable, harmonious families. This dual focus reflects Service Learning's unique value: it cultivates civic responsibility while fostering personal development. By equipping couples with both religious knowledge and practical skills, the program aims to reduce marital conflicts and strengthen community wellbeing.

Monitoring and feedback are integral components of the program implementation. Counselors regularly solicit participants' opinions and experiences, allowing for continuous improvement. This responsiveness to participants' needs is crucial for maintaining engagement and relevance. Furthermore, ongoing assessment helps identify which activities are most impactful, guiding resource allocation and program adjustments.

Despite its many strengths, the implementation of Service Learning in premarital guidance faces challenges. Time constraints, limited resources, and occasional participant reluctance to share personal issues openly can hinder full engagement. However, these obstacles are addressed through creative scheduling, culturally sensitive facilitation, and the cultivation of a respectful, non-judgmental environment. Counselors receive specialized training to manage these dynamics effectively.

The integration of Service Learning into premarital guidance at KUA Percut Sei Tuan represents a significant advancement in preparing couples for married life. By emphasizing active participation, experiential learning, and community engagement, the program fosters both religious understanding and practical readiness. This holistic approach holds promise for nurturing resilient, harmonious families who contribute positively to society.

3.2. Enhancing Religious Readiness Through Service Learning

Service Learning applied within premarital guidance serves as an effective method to deepen the religious readiness of prospective brides and grooms. Unlike conventional lectures, this approach encourages active participation through interactive counseling and group activities that engage couples in the process of learning. This active engagement fosters a more profound understanding of Islamic marriage principles, which are vital for establishing a strong spiritual foundation.

The curriculum designed for the premarital guidance program is rooted in Quranic teachings and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad. Topics include the rights and



obligations of spouses, ethical behavior within the family, and the broader objectives of marriage in Islam. By connecting religious texts to real-life applications, the guidance ensures that participants do not merely memorize doctrines but internalize and live by these teachings.

Group activities such as discussions and case studies provide opportunities for couples to reflect on scenarios they might face in married life. These exercises encourage couples to consider how religious values guide decision-making and behavior in practical terms. For example, discussions about resolving conflicts through patience and compassion are grounded in Islamic ethics and help couples prepare psychologically and spiritually.

Counselors leading these sessions emphasize the sacred nature of marriage as a covenant with Allah. This perspective helps couples view marriage not only as a social contract but as a spiritual commitment that demands responsibility, sincerity, and adherence to divine guidance. Such framing elevates the couple's motivation to uphold religious values and promotes a moral commitment to their union.

Through Service Learning, couples actively participate in learning activities that stimulate dialogue and self-reflection. This participatory model encourages couples to share their own beliefs, ask questions, and clarify doubts related to religious practices. The counselors facilitate this process, ensuring that misconceptions are corrected and knowledge is deepened.

Empirical feedback from counselors indicates that couples who engage in this Service Learning model demonstrate enhanced religious literacy compared to those who receive traditional one-way instruction. Participants report greater confidence in understanding their roles as spouses within Islamic frameworks and express readiness to implement religious teachings in their daily lives.

Table 1 Components of Religious Readiness Enhanced by Service Learning in Premarital Guidance

Component	Description	Activities/Methods	Expected Outcome
Islamic Marriage Principles	Understanding Quranic and Sunnah teachings on marriage	Lectures, Quranic study, group discussions	Deep knowledge of marriage ethics
Rights and Obligations	Spouses' duties towards each other and family	Role-plays, case studies	Clear awareness of responsibilities
Family Ethics	Moral behavior within family settings	Reflective journaling, peer sharing	Internalization of Islamic family values
Spiritual Commitment	Viewing marriage as a sacred covenant with Allah	Counseling, group reflections	Strengthened faith and marital dedication
Conflict Resolution	Applying Islamic ethics in resolving disputes	Simulated conflict scenarios	Improved ability to manage marital conflicts



Misconception Clarification	Addressing doubts and correcting false beliefs	Q&A sessions, guided discussions	Accurate religious understanding
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Table 1 explain how the integration of spiritual readiness within the premarital guidance is complemented by emotional and psychological preparation, making the couples' foundation more holistic. By nurturing both the heart and mind, the program reduces the risk of conflicts arising from religious misunderstandings or neglect of spiritual duties.

A crucial outcome of this enhanced religious readiness is the potential reduction of marital disputes. Religious misunderstandings or ignorance can often lead to conflicts; by preemptively addressing these through comprehensive religious education, the program fosters peaceful and respectful relationships.

The ongoing interaction in service learning allows counselors to assess the depth of participants' religious understanding and adapt teaching materials accordingly. This flexibility ensures that guidance remains relevant to the couples' unique contexts and challenges. Service learning significantly enhances religious readiness by transforming premarital guidance into an engaging, reflective, and practical learning experience. This approach prepares couples not only to fulfill their religious duties but to build marriages grounded in faith, mutual respect, and moral responsibility.

3.3. Strengthening Psychological Readiness Through Experiential Learning

Psychological readiness is a critical dimension in preparing prospective brides and grooms for marriage, and the service learning framework integrated into premarital guidance effectively enhances this aspect (Halberstadt et al., 2019; Salam et al., 2019). Unlike conventional instruction that focuses mainly on knowledge transfer, experiential learning emphasizes active participation and reflection, which enables couples to explore and develop emotional maturity, communication skills, and coping mechanisms essential for married life.

The premarital guidance program incorporates reflective exercises that encourage participants to assess their emotional strengths and vulnerabilities. Through guided self-reflection, couples are invited to identify personal behaviors, emotional triggers, and attitudes that could affect their marital relationship. This introspective process fosters self-awareness, which is foundational to psychological preparedness.

Open discussions form a core part of the experiential learning approach. Facilitated by trained counselors, these dialogues create safe spaces where couples can openly talk about fears, expectations, and challenges related to marriage. Such interactions not only normalize common emotional experiences but also promote empathy and mutual understanding between partners.

Conflict resolution is a major focus area within the program, where couples learn practical strategies grounded in Islamic ethics and psychological principles. By simulating potential disagreements and practicing constructive communication techniques, participants build essential skills to manage disagreements without escalating conflicts. This experiential training helps couples gain confidence in their ability to resolve disputes peacefully.



Communication skills development is another pillar of psychological readiness in the program. Couples engage in role-plays and group activities designed to improve active listening, assertiveness, and non-verbal communication. These exercises highlight the importance of clear and respectful communication as a cornerstone for maintaining intimacy and trust in marriage.

Stress management techniques are introduced to help couples cope with the pressures of marital life and external challenges. Mindfulness exercises, breathing techniques, and problem-solving frameworks are practiced during sessions, equipping couples with tools to maintain emotional balance. Experiential learning enables participants to apply these methods in a supportive environment before facing real-life stressors.

The simulation of real-life marital challenges within the Service Learning framework is particularly valuable. Couples encounter scenarios involving financial management, family interference, and work-life balance, allowing them to experiment with problem-solving strategies. This experiential practice reduces anxiety and builds resilience by transforming abstract knowledge into concrete skills.

Counselors observe and provide constructive feedback during experiential activities, guiding couples toward more adaptive behaviors and attitudes. This ongoing mentorship reinforces learning outcomes and helps couples recognize progress in their psychological readiness. The iterative nature of Service Learning encourages continuous personal growth.

Many participants report enhanced confidence and preparedness after completing the program. They feel better equipped emotionally and mentally to handle the demands of married life. This psychological readiness is crucial not only for the individual wellbeing of spouses but also for the stability and harmony of the family unit.

The integration of experiential learning through service learning in premarital guidance significantly strengthens the psychological readiness of prospective couples. By fostering self-awareness, emotional regulation, effective communication, and conflict resolution skills, the program prepares couples to face marital challenges resiliently and build enduring, loving partnerships.

3.4. Service Learning Approach in Preparing Couples for Marriage

Service Learning as an educational approach integrates community service with structured learning, allowing participants to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world settings while reflecting on their experiences (Jones et al., 2001). In the context of premarital guidance, this method shifts the role of prospective brides and grooms from passive recipients to active learners, enhancing their engagement and internalization of marital values (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). The participatory nature of service learning fosters deeper comprehension of Islamic marriage principles, promoting a spiritual and ethical foundation essential for sustaining harmonious family life (Nugroho et al., 2023).

The interactive activities embedded in service learning, such as group discussions and role-playing (Lesmana & Ristiyana, 2025), provide couples with practical contexts to explore religious obligations and moral duties within marriage. This experiential learning aligns with Kolb's theory (2020), which emphasizes concrete experience followed by reflection as key to meaningful learning outcomes. By practicing conflict resolution and communication skills grounded in religious ethics, couples are better prepared



psychologically and spiritually to face marital challenges (Brien-Bérard & des Rivières-Pigeon, 2023).

Research indicates that premarital programs incorporating experiential and participatory methods significantly improve couples' readiness and marital satisfaction (Abreu-Afonso et al., 2022; Aman et al., 2019; Li et al., 2022). For example, Markman et al. (2022) found that couples who engage actively in learning processes demonstrate better conflict management and emotional regulation skills, which are crucial predictors of marital stability. This supports the premise that service learning not only transmits knowledge but also cultivates the practical competencies necessary for healthy marriages.

Religious readiness, enhanced through service learning, strengthens couples' commitment by fostering an understanding of marriage as a sacred covenant. This spiritual framing motivates couples to uphold Islamic teachings on mutual respect, compassion, and shared responsibility, which have been linked to lower divorce rates and higher family cohesion. The holistic approach of integrating religious doctrine with applied learning experiences thus supports both faith development and relational skills.

Psychological readiness is equally critical, and service learning addresses this by encouraging self-reflection and emotional skill-building. Through guided discussions and experiential exercises, couples develop self-awareness and empathy, core components of emotional intelligence that predict marital success. Moreover, experiential learning environments allow couples to rehearse coping strategies in safe settings, reducing anxiety and enhancing resilience (Kural & Kovacs, 2021).

The reciprocal benefits of service learning further enrich the premarital guidance process. Participants gain valuable life skills, while facilitators and the community receive insights into evolving needs and challenges faced by couples. This dynamic interaction fosters continuous program improvement and strengthens community bonds, aligning with the social capital theory that links community engagement to social cohesion and wellbeing.

Despite these advantages, challenges such as time constraints, cultural sensitivities, and varied participant readiness must be managed to maximize Service Learning's effectiveness in premarital guidance. Tailoring activities to accommodate diverse backgrounds and ensuring facilitators are culturally competent enhances engagement and learning outcomes. Additionally, integrating digital tools can expand access and supplement face-to-face sessions.

4. Conclusions

This study found that the implementation of Service Learning in premarital guidance at the Religious Affairs Office of Percut Sei Tuan effectively enhances the religious and psychological readiness of prospective brides and grooms. Through participatory learning methods involving discussions, reflections, and simulations, couples not only gain theoretical knowledge but also practical skills in managing household life. Participants demonstrated improved understanding of Islamic marriage principles and increased emotional preparedness to face family dynamics.

Findings from the discussion further support that Service Learning is an effective approach combining spiritual and psychological aspects holistically. Interactive and reflective activities enable couples to internalize religious values while developing communication skills, conflict resolution, and stress management. This approach fosters strong moral commitment and emotional resilience, both crucial for building harmonious



and sustainable families. However, program implementation also faces challenges such as limited time, varied participant readiness, and facility constraints.

This research has limitations due to its limited sample size and focus on a single location, which suggests caution in generalizing the results. Future research is recommended to include larger and more diverse samples across multiple regions for a more comprehensive understanding. Additionally, subsequent studies could explore the integration of digital technologies within service learning to improve accessibility and effectiveness of premarital guidance, as well as investigate the long-term impacts on marital stability.

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