Policy Strategy for Supporting Marriage Counseling in Reducing Divorce Trends

Strategi Kebijakan Dukungan Konseling Pernikahan dalam Menurunkan Angka Perceraian

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News Article

Keyword:	Abstract
Divorce Rates; Marriage Counseling; Divorce; Marriage; Religious Leaders.	*This policy paper outlines that the increasing divorce rate in Indonesia indicates the need for more effective policies to support family resilience. One factor contributing to this trend is the low level of awareness among couples about accessing marriage counseling. In developed countries, counseling is a normal part of married life, while in Indonesia, social stigma still hinders this. This paper analyzes this issue and the policies that can be implemented to normalize marriage counseling in Indonesia. The purpose of this policy paper is to formulate comprehensive policy recommendations to address the issues of marriage counseling support and communication, which are the root causes of divorce. A qualitative approach was chosen, emphasizing the U-Process analysis method. The results indicate that couples' awareness of accessing marriage counseling remains low. Individual mental models of each actor can be a barrier to accessing marriage counseling. The potential of religious and cultural leaders has not been fully utilized. Policy recommendations are directed to the Minister of Religious Affairs, religious and cultural leaders, and relevant institutions to support the normalization of marriage counseling through religious and cultural leaders. This approach is expected to create a paradigm shift in society that will be more open to marriage counseling. Marriage counseling becomes a necessity, not just a solution to conflict. This will strengthen family resilience, improve the quality of communication within the household, and reduce the divorce rate in Indonesia.*

Kata Kunci:	Abstrak
Angka Perceraian; Konseling Pernikahan; Perceraian; Pernikahan; Tokoh Agama.	*Policy paper* ini menguraikan bahwa peningkatan angka perceraian di Indonesia menunjukan perlu adanya kebijakan yang lebih efektif dalam mendukung ketahanan keluarga. Salah satu faktor yang menyebabkan terjadinya tren tersebut adalah rendahnya kesadaran pasangan mengakses konseling pernikahan. Di negara maju, konseling menjadi bagian normal dalam kehidupan rumah tangga, sementara di Indonesia masih terhambat dengan adanya stigma sosial. Makalah ini menganalisis permasalahan tersebut dan kebijakan yang dapat diimplementasikan untuk menormalisasi konseling pernikahan di Indonesia. Tujuan *policy paper* ini adalah merumuskan rekomendasi

kebijakan komprehensif dalam menangani permasalahan dukungan konseling pernikahan dan komunikasi yang menjadi akar permasalahan perceraian. Pendekatan kualitatif dipilih dengan menekankan pada metode analisis *U Process*. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa kesadaran pasangan dalam mengakses konseling pernikahan masih rendah. Model mental masing-masing aktor dapat menjadi hambatan dalam mengakses konseling pernikahan. Potensi tokoh agama dan budaya belum dimanfaatkan secara maksimal. Rekomendasi kebijakan ditujukan kepada Menteri Agama, tokoh agama dan budaya, Institusi terkait untuk mendukung normalisasi konseling pernikahan melalui tokoh agama dan budaya. Dengan pendekatan ini diharapkan terjadi perubahan paradigma masyarakat yang dapat lebih terbuka terhadap konseling pernikahan. Konseling pernikahan menjadi sebuah kebutuhan bukan hanya sebagai solusi saat konflik terjadi. Ini akan memperkuat ketahanan keluarga, meningkatkan kualitas komunikasi dalam rumah tangga, serta menekan angka perceraian di Indonesia.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

Harmony is a crucial dynamic in family life. It is about mutual respect, involving mutually supportive cooperation in various situations, and reducing family conflict. Failure to maintain harmony can lead to divorce and threaten family resilience.

Looking at the Family Resilience Index from the legality-structure quality dimension, the Family Quality Development Book Volume 1 states that if a family member does not live in the same household, the score is 0 (zero), indicating that the family does not provide quality protection for family unity (Puspitawati et al., 2022, p. 209).

This situation impacts the achievement of the Golden Indonesia Vision 2045, which includes realizing human resources with morals, advanced culture, and competitiveness. Family resilience is needed as the primary foundation for developing superior individuals in various aspects of life.

The increasing prevalence of divorce in Indonesia is demonstrated by data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS). It was recorded that in 2021 there was an increase of 53.51%, and until 2023 it tended to remain stable at above four hundred thousand events annually.
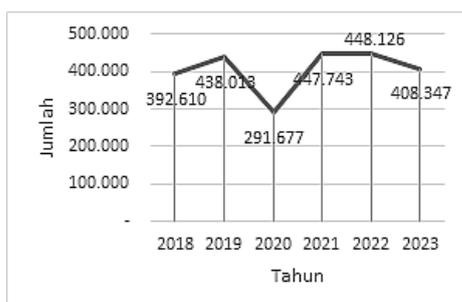
Figure 1. Divorce Rate in Indonesia 2018-2023
Source: (Central Statistics Agency, 2024)

Based on the comparison graph of divorce and marriage, the trend of divorce is increasing, and conversely the trend of marriage tends to decrease.
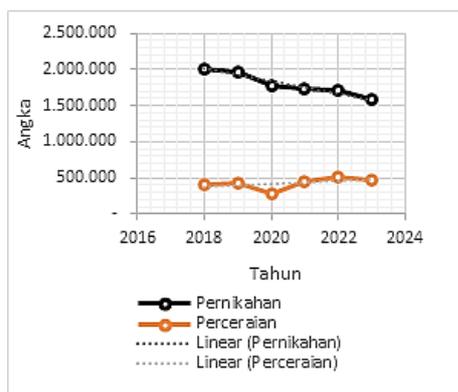
Figure 2. Marriage and Divorce Trends 2018-2023
Source: Central Statistics Agency, 2024

Divorce has negative impacts. Personally, it increases emotional and psychological stress, has social and financial consequences, and impacts children. The grief and loss experienced by children as a result of divorce will affect them physically and psychologically, ultimately impacting their academic performance. This grief and loss can manifest as feelings of anger, anxiety, and depression (Jenz & Cipta Apsari, 2021, p. 8).

The impact of family divorce can disrupt the preparation of the younger generation to become a resilient generation and potentially lead to a generation that loses its competitive edge (Matatula, 2023).

Divorce also poses a challenge to religious life. It violates the sacred value of marriage, contradicting the goal of forming a happy family. It undermines cultural and religious values in a society that highly values intact family life. Divorce impacts the social structure and creates a socio-religious stigma for those involved.

One study shows a link between religiosity and divorce. Highly religious couples are significantly less likely to separate than less religious couples, but both are equally likely to separate, especially for couples living in less religious environments (Vermeulen et al., 2023).

Finally, it is important to recognize that divorce can have significant long-term effects on individuals and families, and that these effects may be particularly pronounced for those who are deeply invested in their religious communities (Baldree, 2025). The increasing trend of divorce in Indonesia is a complex phenomenon and negatively impacts the quality of the human resources produced.

Based on the above, a comprehensive and integrated approach is needed by all stakeholders, including the government, religious leaders, and community members. Appropriate policies and a shared commitment to family resilience are key to realizing the vision of Golden Indonesia 2045, which focuses on developing human resources with morals, advanced culture, and competitiveness.
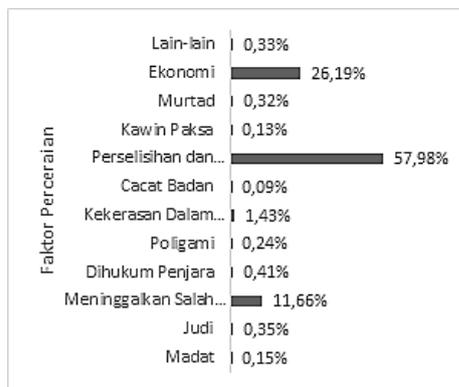
Identification of the Problem

The three biggest factors that consistently cause divorce in Indonesia are:

1. Constant disagreements and arguments;

2. Economic factors; and

3. One of the spouses leaving.

Based on the data, the average for these three factors is depicted in the following graph.

Figure 3. Average Percentage of Divorce Factors 2018-2023
Source: (Central Statistics Agency, 2024)

These three factors are then described using a problem tree diagram to identify the main problems that require policy intervention.
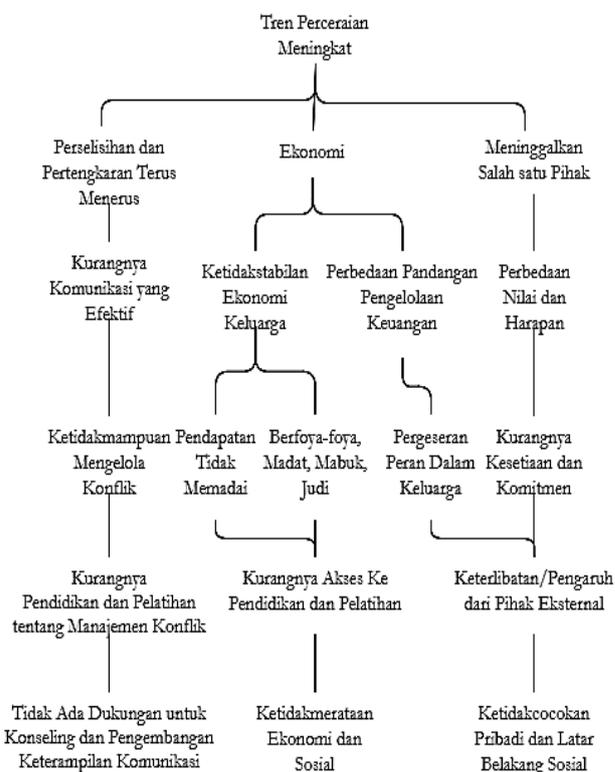
Figure 4. Problem Tree Diagram of Divorce Factors

Three root causes were identified, and then prioritized for treatment using the USG method. Each USG factor—urgency, seriousness, and growth—was scored on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high). The problem descriptions are as follows:

1. Lack of support for counseling and communication skills development;

   - Urgency: Very important and pressing; prolonged conflict affects quality of life.

- Seriousness: The impact is very serious; couples who do not counsel and communicate well have difficulty resolving their problems.

- Growth: Small problems quickly escalate into larger conflicts and result in divorce, which has broader implications.

2. Problems of economic and social inequality

- Urgency: Important and pressing; economic problems significantly impact family stability.

- Seriousness: Very serious; this can cause numerous problems in the household.

- Growth: Problems tend to worsen due to the inability to meet the family's financial needs.

3. Problems related to personal and social background incompatibility.

- Urgency: Quite important, affecting long-term relationships, but not requiring an immediate solution.

- Seriousness: Serious, differences in social background can trigger arguments and family tension.

- Growth: If there is a lack of mutual understanding and respect, it can damage family harmony and affect the environment.

Table 1. Recapitulation of Priorities of Root Problems that must be resolved

Root of the Problem	U	S	G	Total Score
There is no support for counseling and communication skills development	5	5	4	14
Economic and social inequality	4	5	4	13
Personal and social background incompatibility	3	4	4	11

Source: Processed data

The problem of the lack of counseling support and communication skills development received the highest total score, namely 14. This root of the problem is a priority for policy intervention compared to other problems.

Formulation of the Problem

Based on the description above, the problem statement in this policy paper is the increasing trend of divorce due to persistent disputes and arguments. The root cause is the lack of counseling support and communication skills development for couples experiencing conflict. This issue indicates the need for more effective policies to support increased marriage counseling and communication skills development.

Objectives and Benefits of the Study

Study Objectives

The objectives of this paper are:

1. To describe the increasing trend of divorce in Indonesia, including the behavioral patterns, structures, and mental models that influence it.

2. To present a policy analysis related to divorce and marriage counseling.

3. To formulate comprehensive policy recommendations that can address the identified problems.

4. To explain the importance of raising public awareness to support marriage counseling and the development of communication skills to reduce the divorce rate.

Benefits of the Study

The benefits of this paper include:

1. To provide data and facts about divorce trends, their underlying causes, and their impacts.

2. To present clear information to assist policymakers in the importance of interventions to prevent divorce.

3. To provide evidence-based policy recommendations and analysis to address the root causes of the problem.

4. To encourage community participation in public awareness campaigns on the importance of counseling and communication skills programs.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Theoretical Framework

Mental Models

A mental model is a simplified set of causal beliefs and epistemic values that people use to interpret events (Doyle et al., 2022, p. 2). A study by Atikah et al. states that a mental model is an internal representation constructed by an individual when interpreting and understanding a new concept or phenomenon (Atikah et al., 2023, p. 107). In the iceberg theory, this mental model is the final phase, as stated in a journal. The fourth phase is mental model analysis, the final phase of iceberg analysis (Yuniarti et al., 2024, p. 60). Based on this publication, mental models are the fundamental elements underlying the occurrence of an event or phenomenon.

Marriage Counseling and Communication

According to Willis, marriage counseling is an effort undertaken by professional counselors to help married couples or prospective married couples resolve their problems. This allows them to develop and resolve the problems they face through mutual respect, tolerance, and understanding communication, thus creating family harmony (Hurriyati & Dedy Tama, 2024, p. 518).

Communication is a crucial element for a happy marriage. It enhances intimacy, enabling a marriage to navigate both good and challenging times. Effective communication skills don't come naturally; they need to be practiced and developed (Stupart, 2023).

Counseling and communication skills development services play a role in supporting couples' mental health. This requires professionals in the field. According to the 2020 Mental Health Atlas report by the World Health Organization, there has been a decline in the availability of mental health professionals, with 3 per 100,000 people in Indonesia (World Health Organization, 2021).

Family: A Religious Perspective

Investing in human capital is an effort to increase family stability and prevent divorce. The functions of the family include religious, socio-cultural, love, protection, reproduction, socialization and education, economic, and environmental development (Puspitawati et al., 2022).

As the primary environment in society, the family is required and obliged to foster interactions between family members to achieve a harmonious and peaceful family life (Dewi et al., 2023). A peaceful family life (sakinah) based on love and affection is the primary goal of the Islamic legalization of marriage (Muslifah & Busriyanti, 2024). The achievement of the goals of jagadhita can be realized through a prosperous family (sukinah), where physical and spiritual needs are met.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is a guide to analyzing data/information in a systematic and structured manner.
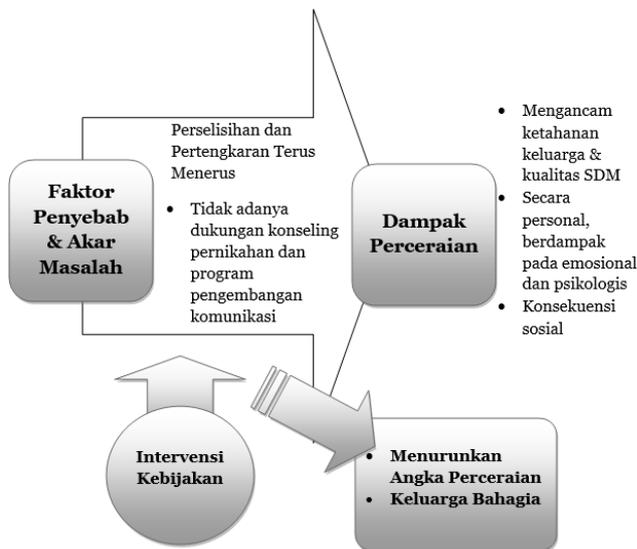
Figure 5. Conceptual Framework of Policy Intervention

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach was chosen to understand social phenomena such as the increasing trend in divorce. Data and information were sourced from relevant literature to help understand the context and issues related to the proposed policy.

The data and information were then analyzed using the U Process analysis. This analysis is used to intervene at the root of the main problem and create systemic change. This analysis consists of three stages: sensing, presencing, and realizing. Otto Scharmer's U-Perspective offers a transformational approach: confirming existing information; focusing on new facts; deepening emotional understanding; and focusing on a shared future (Hermawan & Rahman, 2024).

Otto Scharmer, in an article written by Said Hassan, stated that the failure to see is the greatest barrier to solving challenges. Therefore, the primary goal of the sensing phase is to open ourselves, uncover reality, and see the system of which we are a part (Hassan,

2018). At this stage, it is crucial to identify and understand the problem collaboratively, involving all parties.

Next, a paradigm shift is implemented at the presencing stage. This stage is about achieving deep knowledge and clarity about what to do next. In Theory U, awareness moves toward the bottom of the U shape (presencing), and then moves upward through the U to initiate effective behavior in professional practice (Gunnlaugson et al., 2014, p. 81). This provides confidence that change must be made to address the underlying problem.

The next stage, realizing, is the phase of clearly understanding what needs to be done next. A crystallization process occurs, creating a clear picture of what is desired. This stage provides a policy design that needs to be tested, evaluated, and disseminated comprehensively and impactfully for social impact.

Theory U is an awareness-based method for changing systems, so it can also be used to support the nation's Mental Revolution (Elvis, 2023, p. 34). In this context, analyzing using a U perspective is an effort to determine new attitudes and habits toward marriage counseling and effective communication. Combining qualitative approaches with the chosen analysis can be used to explore issues in depth and propose data- and information-based policy recommendations.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Results and Discussion

Sensing (Observing Reality)

Observing the increasing trend of divorce cases since 2021, we can discern behavioral patterns, structures, and mental models of the actors involved. The lack of support for marriage counseling and communication skills development makes it more difficult for couples to resolve conflicts constructively.

While it is very difficult to obtain data regarding access to marriage counseling in Indonesia, there are still opportunities to identify behavioral patterns from available literature. Hutami and colleagues revealed that interview data showed that wives often sulk and get angry with their husbands, while husbands choose to remain silent and change the subject (Hutami et al., 2022). Based on this information, several patterns of couple behavior are identified.

First, couples believe that talking about their feelings is unimportant. Couples who are unable to express their feelings and needs clearly only create pent-up feelings, dissatisfaction, and anger. This partner's dissatisfaction can trigger prolonged disputes and arguments.

Second, couples' inability to use empathy to listen to each other without prejudice can lead to feelings of disrespect and defensiveness. This pattern of ineffective couple communication reflects a habit of repeated fighting.

Third, couples experiencing communication problems tend to avoid uncomfortable discussions. This buildup of discomfort creates negative feelings that can trigger arguments. This pattern creates a cycle of conflict, with issues never being resolved, only recurring arguments.

These patterns indicate couples are unable to communicate effectively. They don't know how to express their feelings clearly, listen with empathy, and resolve differences in a healthy manner. Although in a journal, Sulanti and colleagues offer two models of

conflict resolution: first, compromise, which is carried out by the husband and wife without involving a third party. Second, mediation, which involves a neutral third party (Sulti et al., 2020). They don't know and understand how to defuse tensions and find solutions together. The lack of access to counseling tends to repeat the negative patterns that have formed, and they don't have the opportunity to explore and understand the root of their problems.

Structurally, religion teaches its followers to foster happy and prosperous families. To build a happy family, it is important to communicate with mutual understanding, avoid imposing opinions, be patient, compassionate, and non-violent. For this reason, marriage counseling services are available. Religious institutions such as the Marriage Guidance and Preservation Advisory Board (BP4), the Religious Affairs Office (KUA), and places of worship already provide marriage counseling and guidance services. The private sector also offers these services. However, there are barriers for couples accessing these services. Studies have shown that couples in conflict are less consistent in attending counseling and often already have a final plan for divorce. Counseling techniques do not have a positive impact on the client's psyche, and the public is less concerned about counseling at the KUA (Wulan, 2021). This indicates that these services have not been able to attract public interest in accessing marriage counseling.

Personal stigma, such as feelings of shame or fear of being considered a failure in building a marriage, also contributes. Public perception view accessing marriage counseling as a sign of weak faith and failure in practicing religion. This aligns with Kelly Omondi's findings in a journal.

Public stigma led to social exclusion and reinforced negative self-perceptions, while self-stigma resulted in feelings of shame and low self-worth, deterring individuals from seeking treatment. Institutional stigma, characterized by discriminatory policies and inadequate resources, further hinders access to care (Omondi, 2024).

Furthermore, accessibility and infrastructure perspectives indicate that marriage counseling is very limited, especially in non-urban areas. If the service is provided by the private sector, it certainly requires a fee. This cost can be a barrier for couples who spend money on marriage counseling. Information from the website biaya nikah (marriage cost) indicates that some marriage counseling services are free, while others are paid, depending on the type of counseling (Anjar, 2025).

The media also plays a role in the divorce trend. Frequent negative coverage of idol figures facing marital problems can influence the perceptions of couples experiencing similar conflicts, especially when idol figures are reported to have divorced without seeking counseling. This is in line with the research findings of Lidwina Mutia Sadasri, who stated that they repeatedly expressed sadness when their idols were down and pride when they achieved success. There is a divided emotional connection between idols and their fans (Sadasri, 2021).

The structures described above shape a mental model of couples who believe divorce is the only solution to a troubled relationship. Many couples believe marital problems must be resolved privately without interference from others. This model of problem-solving tends to focus only on surface-level conflicts, without understanding the deeper roots of the problem. On the other hand, some couples who are less religious or feel distant from religion have differing views on the role of religion in their lives. This situation makes it difficult to access marriage counseling.

Religious and community leaders believe that marriage is a sacred bond that must be carefully maintained. Every marital problem is directed to a religious solution. This perspective tends to view marital problems solely from a moral and spiritual perspective,

but fails to recognize the importance of professional counseling support and communication skills development.

Counselors and service providers believe that marriage counseling helps couples resolve their problems. Counseling can also help build healthier relationships. Good communication support can prevent divorce. A structured approach and professional perspective from counselors and service providers often present challenges in reaching couples who are reluctant to seek help. The cost of counseling also poses a barrier to encouraging couples to access marriage counseling.

From the perspective of policymakers and governments, they believe that family support is an effort to improve the overall well-being of society. Policymakers often assume that established programs are sufficient to help couples facing problems. This tendency views the problem from a public policy perspective, but feedback from the realities of society must be considered. The challenge lies in allocating sufficient resources to provide support for counseling and communication skills development.

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Observations based on the information above indicate that each actor in the system has a different perspective on marriage counseling and communication skills development. Couples in conflict view marital problems as a personal matter, compounded by the social stigma surrounding access to marriage counseling.

Referring to government policy, counseling services are provided through the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) and the BP4 (Religious Affairs Agency). However, data-based evaluation and feedback are urgently needed to make the policy more responsive to community needs. On the other hand, religious and community leaders offer advice. This solution is normative, without incorporating psychological approaches and effective communication. The counselor's perspective prioritizes reactivity over proactivity in reaching couples in conflict.

The sensing stage revealed that the communication bridges between the actors involved are still inadequate. Counseling services have not fully reached the groups in need and have not yet become part of the culture for couples in Indonesia. Social stigma and beliefs are barriers to accessing marriage counseling services.

Presencing (Opening Yourself to New Possibilities)

The actors involved need to reflect on themselves and be open to understanding each other's perspectives. Based on the data and information outlined previously, a new paradigm can be formed.

Table 2. Comparison Matrix of Old and New Paradigms

Old Paradigm	New Paradigm
The stigma of counseling is only for troubled couples	Counseling as a preventive strategy to strengthen relationships
Marriage problems must be resolved independently	Seeking counseling is a proactive step in building healthy relationships
Government counseling and communication programs are sufficient	Programs should be data-driven, responsive, and easily accessible
Counselors only serve those who seek help	Counselors proactively reach out to couples through education and community
Religion is sufficient as a guideline for marriage	Religion and marriage counseling can complement each other for a couple's happiness

Source: Processed data.

This paradigm emphasizes a reactive mindset toward a proactive one. Marriage counseling and effective communication are part of maintaining a relationship, not just a last resort when problems arise. Raising public awareness about the benefits of counseling for all couples is crucial.

Each actor involved needs to reflect on themselves to open up and understand each other's perspectives.

1. Couples view counseling as a communication step toward creating a healthy relationship;

2. The government can provide data-driven and easily accessible counseling services;

3. Counselors are more proactive in reaching out to the public and providing education and a community-based approach;

4. Religious and community leaders provide marriage counseling education within existing religious activities. They can act as counselors or collaborate with counselors to integrate religious values with a marriage psychology approach as a balanced solution.

Opportunities are wide open for collaboration between the actors involved. This includes integrating religious approaches with marriage psychology approaches, which need to be well-developed. Religion plays a crucial role, as evidenced by Indonesia's diverse and religious society. Every aspect of community life is closely influenced by religious values. According to a report published by the Pew Research Center, more than half of Indonesians (83%) believe that religion has a greater impact on the country today than it did 20 years ago (Poushter et al., 2019).

Religious leaders play a crucial role in providing moral and ethical guidance on marriage, which fosters happy families. Mental health professionals contribute research-based communication and conflict resolution techniques. This collaboration ensures that couples receive not only normative advice but also practical strategies for maintaining relationships.

Religious and culturally relevant approaches also need to be prioritized. Furthermore, the quality of counselors needs to be enhanced. This is reinforced by a journal's conclusion that recognizing religious and spiritual needs has been shown to significantly impact the effectiveness of collaborative work (Pastwa-Wojciechowska et al., 2021). Therefore, collaboration between religion and the mental health sector is crucial for conflict resolution and building healthy relationships.

Realizing (Implementing Change)

Given the new paradigm outlined above, several layers of counseling can be conceptualized: preventive, early intervention, and restorative counseling.

Preventive counseling targets prospective couples who are about to marry. This counseling is conducted before marriage or at the beginning of marriage to provide preparation and understanding about marriage. This model of counseling not only provides religious advice but also involves psychology, communication, family financial management, and conflict management. This concept can be conducted either face-to-face or through digital platforms. A more flexible hybrid counseling model (face-to-face and online) may be an option. The application designed must provide easy access in terms of time and place. This access can include online counseling, marriage readiness tests, including household conflict simulations and Artificial Intelligence (AI)-based chatbots.

Early intervention counseling can be provided when a conflict begins to arise. This can take the form of free counseling services for a specific period at the Religious Affairs Office (KUA) or a designated institution. Another form of early intervention can include

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family mentoring by cadres who serve as basic counseling facilitators in the village. Professionals in religious counseling, family counseling, and community outreach need to be provided.

A restorative counseling layer can be implemented to handle severe conflicts. Couples filing for divorce are required to undergo mediation counseling sessions. This service is used to offer solutions to couples so they can reconsider their marriage. Providing family counseling in every city should also be considered, certainly at an affordable cost or with incentives.

The next step at this stage is to improve the counseling service structure. Integrative marriage counseling is crucial, as concluded by Bustan et al., who found that integrative counseling is quite effective in helping address marital and family issues (Bustan et al., 2022). Integrative services also involve stakeholder collaboration within government policy. The ministries of religious affairs, health, and population and family development are obligated to facilitate face-to-face and online counseling services. Local governments contribute to reducing divorce rates by providing community-based counseling programs integrated with population document services.

Furthermore, partnerships between stakeholders are needed to support implementation in the community. Similarly, media involvement as part of public campaigns to educate the public about the benefits of marriage counseling is also needed.

Technology-based counseling structures can also be improved by providing counseling service applications as a platform for educating the public and providing online counseling. A database of married couples should also be established. This way, information on couples who have undergone counseling and the progress of their relationships can be monitored and periodically evaluated.

Collaboration between religious and community leaders is also needed by establishing faith-based counseling teams. These leaders and communities should also be trained in marriage psychology approaches. This aligns with the findings of a study by Jannah et al. (2024).

Multicultural counselors require competencies such as recognizing values, understanding counseling principles, maintaining open-mindedness, and conducting effective counseling. The study emphasizes the importance of counselor training in cultural diversity to provide effective and culturally sensitive counseling services. Strengthening multicultural counseling principles can empower mental health professionals to support Indonesia's culturally diverse communities (Jannah et al., 2024).

In this way, they can provide counseling not only with a religious approach but also with a modern approach. This structure can also incorporate counseling material into religious sermons.

The content of religious sermons serves as guidance for people in navigating married life and forming a happy family. This role is part of encouraging couples to engage in self-reflection and is expected to increase their awareness. Couples can recognize each other's strengths and weaknesses, develop empathy, listen to their partner's needs, and re-evaluate the purpose of marriage.

Monitoring and evaluation can be conducted by measuring divorce trends, demand for counseling services, and satisfaction with marriage counseling services.

The proposed approach can be implemented on a small scale first and evaluated before being implemented on a larger scale. Marriage counseling programs can begin with pilot

projects in several regions. On a larger scale, this can be achieved by making marriage counseling a national priority, increasing public literacy about marriage counseling, and building a sustainable marriage counseling ecosystem.

The implementation of the designed policy is for the common good. This policy is used to address divorce issues and create happy families. As Indonesia's great hope is to create human resources who are moral, have advanced culture and are competitive.

Policy Analysis

The government, through the Ministry of Religious Affairs, has issued a policy through Circular Letter No. 2 of 2024 from the Director General of Islamic Community Guidance concerning Marriage Guidance for Prospective Brides and Grooms. This Circular requires prospective brides and grooms to attend marriage guidance at the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA), either through traditional, in-person, or virtual methods, referring to Decree No. 189 of 2021 concerning Guidelines for the Implementation of Marriage Guidance for Prospective Brides and Grooms (Circular Letter No. 02 of 2024 concerning Marriage Guidance for Prospective Brides and Grooms, 2024). This policy focuses more on preventative counseling and offers flexibility in implementation methods. This policy only applies to members of one religion. To reach all religious communities, this policy could be regulated by higher-level regulations.

The National Population and Family Planning Agency (BKKBN)'s "Ready to Marry" platform provides educational services, consultations, and assesses pre-marriage readiness. This platform's advantage is its ability to reach a wider target audience of adolescents. This policy needs to be optimized by strengthening synergy between intersecting ministries, including the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Ministry of Health, and others. This digital platform policy also focuses primarily on preventive counseling specifically for adolescents. The challenge is to expand this platform's reach beyond adolescents to include newlyweds. The platform's responsiveness to consultation services also needs to be improved.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between ministries/agencies on marriage guidance and health services for prospective brides and grooms is in place. This policy synergizes cross-sectoral programs to prepare prospective brides and grooms for quality family life. This service integration is holistic, ensuring prospective brides and grooms receive not only marriage knowledge but also health and nutrition services. Stakeholder collaboration is hampered by differing interests among stakeholders and passive communities in empowerment (Septiani et al., 2021). Implementation requires intensive coordination due to differing priorities and bureaucratic constraints. Service standardization also poses a challenge to providing excellent service to the community.

Policy Alternative

From the discussion above, five strategic policy alternatives can be formulated. Policy priority selection uses William N. Dunn's analytical method with six variables:

1. Variable (A) Effectiveness. This indicates the extent to which the policy achieves its objectives.
2. Variable (B) Efficiency. This indicates how well the policy utilizes resources.
3. Variable (C) Political Feasibility. This indicates the extent of stakeholder support.

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4. Variable (D) Social Acceptability. This indicates the extent to which the policy is accepted by the public.

5. Variable (E) Sustainability. This indicates the ability of the policy to continue in the long term.

6. Variable (F) Responsiveness. This indicates the extent to which the policy addresses public needs.

Each variable can be assigned a value from 1 to 10. The total is the final value of all variables.

Table 3. Selection of Policy Priorities

Policy	A	B	C	D	E	F	Total
Implementing evidence-based marriage counseling education campaigns	9	8	8	8	8	9	**50**
Implementing normalization of counseling through religious and cultural leaders	9	8	10	10	9	9	**55**
Providing incentives for counseling participation	7	7	9	7	8	7	**45**
Strengthening the role of media and digital content	8	7	8	8	8	9	**48**
Establishing marriage counseling as part of lifelong learning	9	8	9	9	9	9	**53**

Source: Processed data

Based on the results above, the policy of Implementing Normalized Counseling Through Religious and Cultural Leaders received the highest score, at 55. This policy is more effective in conveying the importance of marriage counseling to the community. This is because religion plays a dominant role in every aspect of community life. Religious and cultural leaders, who serve as role models in the community, further strengthen this factor. Therefore, the implementation of normalized marriage counseling in the community can be more effective and easier to implement.

In terms of efficiency, this policy accesses resources by leveraging the extensive structures and networks within religious and cultural communities. Utilizing resources through this collaboration can reduce costs, resulting in more efficient resource use.

This selected policy has very high political feasibility. Leaders see the potential of religious leaders as powerful figures who can mobilize the community. The government can collaborate with religious and cultural leaders to ensure the success of the implementation of normalized marriage counseling. Policies involving religious and cultural leaders tend to have broader political support.

Policies that align with religious and local values held by the community are more easily accepted. Marriage counseling will be considered part of religious and cultural values, rather than taboo. This can reduce community resistance to marriage counseling.

Integrating marriage counseling policies into religious and cultural practices offers the potential for long-term sustainability. This can be influenced by a more stable social structure through the involvement of religious and cultural leaders. Marriage counseling can also be integrated with population document services and health services, creating mutually supportive sustainability.

The involvement of religious and cultural leaders allows programs to be tailored to the specific needs of the community, making them more responsive to marital issues within the community.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Couples in Indonesia remain low on access to marriage counseling, while the divorce trend is rising. Different mental models of each actor remain barriers to accessing marriage counseling. Marriage counseling policies are also not yet integrated. The potential of religious and cultural leaders has not been fully utilized.

Changing the mindset and practice of marriage counseling as a culture requires a collective effort involving all actors involved. A proactive approach is needed to prevent escalating marital conflict. To increase couples' awareness of accessing marriage counseling, policies can be implemented to normalize marriage counseling involving religious and cultural leaders.

Recommendation

The recommendation is addressed to the Minister of Religious Affairs to immediately issue a regulation in the form of a Ministerial Regulation on religion- and culture-based marriage counseling for all couples, applicable to all religions. The regulation covers standards for marriage counseling services, involvement of religious and cultural leaders, limitations and responsibilities of counselors, provision of training and certification for religious and cultural leaders as counselors, and incentives (honorariums, allowances, and facilities) for active religious and cultural counselors.

It is hoped that these recommendations will encourage the public to be more open and access marriage counseling. Marriage counseling is a necessity, not just a solution when conflict arises. Implementing this policy will strengthen family resilience, improve the quality of communication within the household, and reduce the divorce rate in Indonesia.

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