

## Effectiveness of premarital counseling in Indonesia: Literature review

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**Abstract:** This research aims to determine the picture of premarital counseling practices in Indonesia, which have developed over the past five years (2019-2023) as a trend. The research design uses a literature review because the researcher wants to review several articles published in scientific journals. The research instrument uses content analysis guidelines containing four main aspects: counseling model, type of counselee, counseling strategy, and counseling results. The researcher analyzed data by selecting several articles published in scientific journals using inclusion and exclusion criteria. After the researcher collected the articles, the quality of the articles, which contained four main aspects, was assessed and synthesized. An overview of premarital counseling practices in Indonesia shows that they use more group counseling models than individual counseling models. The counselees who take part in premarital counseling are more prospective brides and grooms than students, developmentally most of whom are in early adulthood with an age range of 18-40 years. The counseling strategy used is providing information. Therefore, this program can be called educational counseling. The results of premarital counseling have more influence on increasing the counselee's knowledge, and this increase in knowledge has implications for the counselee's readiness to face marriage.

**Keywords:** Counselling model; divorce; educational counselling; premarital counselling

### Introduction

Divorce is unexpected condition that occurs in a married relationship between husband and wife. It can cause changes in family life and negatively impact individuals. According to the perspective of family systems theory (Stewart & Brentano, 2006), divorce is a result of dysfunctional relationships within the family and can disrupt children's functioning after divorce. In other words, divorce not only impacts the mental health of husband and wife but also the mental and physical health of all family members (Damota, 2019).

The divorce phenomenon in Indonesia experiences an increase in the number of cases every year. According to a report by the Central Statistics Agency (BPS, 2023), it was recorded that in 2022, the divorce rate will reach 516,334 cases. This figure increased by 15.31% compared to 2021, which reached 447,743 cases. Divorce cases in 2022 are among the highest in the last six years. The highest divorce rate in 2022 will be in West Java province (113,643 cases), followed by East Java (102,065 cases) and Central Java (85,412 cases). The leading cause of divorce in 2022 is disputes and quarrels, totaling 284,169 cases (63.41%).

Meanwhile, other divorce cases are caused by economic problems, one party leaving, domestic violence, and polygamy. There are several other demographic factors that cause divorce; unpreparedness for marriage both physically and emotionally, incompatibility, infidelity, and violence both physically and psychologically. Socio-economic factors that trigger divorce are a lack of economic resources and a wife's income that is more significant than the husband's. There has been a change in the relationship between women's education and divorce; in some countries, highly educated women are more likely to divorce (Nurhalisa, 2021).

The increase in the divorce rate may continue to increase the number of cases in the following years. Therefore, preventive steps are needed to prevent this through premarital counseling. According to Murray & Murray (2004), premarital counseling and education is an intervention carried out for couples planning to get married. It aims to provide information about how to improve their relationship after marriage. Conceptually, premarital counseling and premarital education are different. Premarital counseling is a form of therapy given to individuals or couples who are facing particular problems.

In contrast, premarital education is an educational program with a curriculum specifically designed for couples who are getting married (Clyde et al., 2019). In Indonesia, services that provide information to couples getting married are often called premarital guidance or counseling services. In previous research, premarital counseling was proven to increase participants' understanding of how to meet their and their partner's needs and healthily resolve conflicts (Harris et al., 2019) and was also proven to be effective in increasing marital satisfaction (Elrayes et al., 2023; Udofia et al., 2021); evidence of the effectiveness of premarital counseling states that premarital counseling is an essential service and is needed by couples who are getting married.

The effectiveness of premarital counseling or education in increasing the understanding or readiness of couples to get married in previous research was measured qualitatively (Anriani & Nurjannah, 2021) and quantitatively (Sari et al., 2022). Qualitatively, it is measured through the couple's statements regarding the material provided. Meanwhile, quantitatively, it is measured by comparing a group's pretest and posttest scores. Qualitatively, the number of subjects studied is relatively minor compared to quantitatively. The researcher believes that the description of the effectiveness of premarital counseling in Indonesia needs to be researched through a literature review to get a broad picture of the aspects that play a role in the effectiveness of premarital counseling.

Previous research found various forms of premarital guidance service programs, such as individual, group, and virtual guidance, in the form of modules. However, group guidance is the most effective form of premarital guidance service (Ginting & Purnama, 2023). Other research presented by Adyani et al. (2023) states that the factor that influences the prospective bride and groom's knowledge in preparing for marriage is premarital education or providing information. These two previous studies show that the effectiveness of premarital counseling is related to the counseling model and strategy. Researchers are interested in reviewing the effectiveness of premarital counseling in terms of four aspects: counseling model, counselee characteristics, counseling strategies, and counseling results.

The question that guides this research is how to describe the effectiveness of premarital counseling in Indonesia. This research aims to review the effectiveness of premarital counseling in Indonesia.

## Method

This research design uses a literature review. The procedures include: (1). Search for information from articles published on Google Scholar. (2). Article selection is carried out using inclusion and exclusion criteria to determine whether the article is suitable for use (inclusion) or not suitable for use (exclusion) in research. An article is declared suitable for use in research if: (a) the article is published in a particular journal that has e-ISSN; (b) the publication year is between 2019-2023; (c) obtained from Google Scholar; (d) relates to the topic of premarital counseling. (3). Article quality assessment includes: (a) whether the article contains a premarital counseling model; (b) whether the article contains a particular type of counselee; (c) whether the article contains counseling strategies; (d) whether the article contains counseling results.

The data used in this research comes from articles published on Google Scholar from 2019 to 2023. A number of these articles have been published in specific journals with ISSN. Google Scholar is a data search engine that can search for scientific literature and academic resources. Based on a search for articles with the keyword “premarital counselling” on Google Scholar with included citations, there are 10,200 articles. Without citations or unchecked citations, the result is 9,480 articles. When the article search was limited to 2019-2023, the results were 6,350. Then, the search focused on keywords that appeared only in the article title, and the results were 78 articles. The search results using inclusion and exclusion criteria obtained 28 articles, then all articles were analyzed, and the final number of nine articles that best met the criteria was obtained.

The research instrument used in this research is a content analysis guide that contains the related aspects observed (Table 1). There are four aspects reviewed or analyzed in this research. These four aspects include (1) the counseling model, (2) characteristics of the counselee, (3) counseling strategies, and (4) counseling results.

**Table 1. Content analysis guidelines**

Aspect	Category
<b>Counselling Model</b>	A1-Individual
	A2-Group
<b>Characteristics</b>	B1-Student
	B2-Bride and groom
	B3-Early adulthood
	B4-Female
	B5-Age
	B6-Religion
	B7- Special issues
<b>Counselling strategies</b>	C1-Scaling question
	C2-Client-centred
	C3-Information
	C4-Lecture
	C5-Cognitive Counseling
	C6-Counseling Solution-Focused
	Brief Therapy
	C7- Discussion
	C8-Questions and answers
	C9-Pocketbook
	C10-Offline & online counseling
C11-Other	

<b>Result</b>	D1-Comprehension increases D2-Decreased anxiety D3-Optimistic D4-Other
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Data analysis was conducted by selecting several articles published in scientific journals using inclusion and exclusion criteria and assessing their quality using four criteria: whether the articles contained models, types, strategies, and counseling results. The results of the article quality assessment are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. Articles based on four aspects of quality assessment**

No	Author	Model	Counselee	Strategy	Result
1.	Doloksaribu & Simatupang, 2019 (Wahana Inovasi)	Group	Woman Age: 20-35 years Last education: High school	Information	Increasing adult women's knowledge and attitudes towards preconception nutrition
2.	Yuliarti & Karneli, 2020 (TERAPUTIK: Jurnal Bimbingan dan Konseling)	Individual	Dewasa Awal Age: 33 years Problem: Worried	Client-centered	More optimistic about marriage
3.	Wulandari & Fitriani, 2021 (Jurnal J-KBPI)	Individual	Bride Problem: Worried	Scaling question	Reduces pre-wedding anxiety
4.	Aulia & Hasneli, 2022 (PUSAKO: Jurnal Pengabdian Psikologi)	Group	Bride Islam	Lecture; discussion; pocketbook; offline and online counseling	Increasing knowledge of prospective brides and grooms regarding marriage
5.	Pitrotussaadah, 2022 (Jurnal Perspektif)	Individual	Bride Islam	Lecture, discussion, and questions answers	Increasing knowledge of prospective brides and grooms regarding marriage
6.	Surtiati & Rani, 2022 (Jurnal Riset Kesehatan)	Group	Student age: 20-30 years Higher Education	Information	Increasing students' knowledge and attitudes towards partner selection
7.	Sari et al., 2022 (As-Syar'i: Jurnal Bimbingan dan Konseling Keluarga)	Group	Youth age: 18-40 years	Information	Increasing young people's marriage readiness
8.	Wahyudi & Aini, 2022 (Bayan Lin Naas: Jurnal Dakwah Islam)	Individual	Bride age: < 19 years Islam	Cognitive counseling in the form of motivation, briefing, understanding, and suggestions	Prevent divorce due to early marriage.
9.	Sari, 2023 (Jurnal Promotif Preventif)	Group	Teenager age: 15-19 years	Counseling Solution-Focused Brief Therapy	Increasing knowledge of premarital sexual behavior in adolescents

The premarital counseling models used, as shown in Table 2, include individual and group counseling models. However, the counseling model that is widely used is the group model. The group model can be used for therapeutic or educational purposes or a combination of the two (Corey, 2010). In premarital counseling, counseling services with

therapeutic aims are represented by the term premarital counseling. In contrast, the term educational counseling represents counseling services with educational aims.

Conceptually, premarital counseling and educational counseling have differences. Clyde et al. (2019) explain educational counseling as an educational program with a curriculum designed for couples preparing or seriously considering marriage. Meanwhile, premarital counseling is a particular form of therapy aimed at helping couples who are in the process of considering marriage to help them maintain their marriage. Educational counseling is a broader approach, usually carried out in groups and focuses on equipping couples with marital knowledge and skills to help foster and maintain a healthy marriage. Meanwhile, premarital counseling is a narrower approach that offers structured assistance for the prospective bride and groom to discuss and overcome important or specific topics, concerns, and potential challenges that may arise during the couple's marriage (Ekwe, 2024). This understanding clearly explains the essential differences between educational and premarital counseling.

In previous research, premarital counseling or premarital education using a group model had a positive impact, including it could reduce idealistic expectations of marriage (Rajabi & Abbasi, 2019), it could increase knowledge about sex, reproductive health, and attitudes towards premarital sexual behavior (Murdiningsih et al., 2020; Badriah et al., 2023; Sejati & Mufida, 2021; Omar et al., 2021), can help couples improve their ability to communicate, set realistic expectations for marriage and develop conflict resolution skills. In addition, premarital counseling can help couples build a positive attitude in seeking help in the future (Mary, 2016) and increase marital satisfaction (Udofia et al., 2021). Premarital educational counseling is not only effective in groups but also individually. According to previous research, individual educational counseling has been proven to be effective in reducing anxiety levels in pregnant women who experience preeclampsia (Abazarnejad et al., 2019) and reducing anxiety for prospective brides (Rofiq et al., 2022). Thus, it can be said that premarital educational counseling is effective in both group and individual counseling models.

Counselees who took part in premarital counseling, as shown in Table 2, included teenagers, youths, students, women, early adults, and prospective brides. The counselees most frequently reported to have received premarital guidance were prospective brides and grooms (Wulandari & Fitriani, 2021; Aulia & Hasneli, 2022; Pitrotussaadah, 2022; Wahyudi & Aini, 2022). The prospective bride and groom are two men and women preparing for marriage by attending premarital counseling. In previous research, gender was reported to have a significant relationship with the prospective bride and groom's marriage readiness (Kurniawati & Ardiansyah, 2021). Although women's readiness for marriage tends to be higher than men's (Mawaddah et al., 2019), both readiness is influenced by educational factors in providing information obtained before marriage (Adyani et al., 2023).

The counselee's age was not reported in 3 articles (Wulandari & Fitriani, 2021; Aulia & Hasneli, 2022; Pitrotussaadah, 2022), but the remaining articles reported the counselee's age. Several articles reported early adulthood (18-40 years) more frequently. In previous research, the age of the prospective bride and groom was reported to have a significant relationship with readiness to marry, and prospective brides who were ready to marry were 22-23 years old (Kurniawati & Ardiansyah, 2021), the age of marriage for men and women

has been postponed until the late 20s or 30s (Tanner & Arnett, 2016). According to the psychosocial development theory initiated by Erickson (Feist & Feist, 2010), the most prominent issues in early adulthood are intimacy and alienation; this shows that the appropriate age for marriage is early adulthood.

The counselee's education was not reported in 7 articles, but the remaining articles reported the counselee's education, namely high school and college. In previous research, it was reported that whether a person's education is high or low influences the level of knowledge gained when attending counseling. The higher a person's level of education, the higher the desire to learn and easily make positive changes (Doloksaribu & Simatupang, 2019; Ma'ruf et al., 2023). The educational level of the prospective bride and groom is a factor that influences increasing knowledge.

The client's religion should have been reported explicitly in 9 articles. However, three other articles implicitly state that the counselee is Muslim (Aulia & Hasneli, 2022; Pitrotussaadah, 2022; Wahyudi & Aini, 2022). This conclusion was drawn because the setting for premarital counseling was implemented at the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA). The focus of the research in these three articles is not on the religion of the prospective bride and groom but on the effectiveness of the counseling services. The research results of these three articles state that premarital counseling in religious institutional settings has an impact on increasing knowledge readiness and preventing divorce. Therefore, the role of the counselor or premarital counseling instructor here is vital. The results of previous studies also stated that one of the essential components in premarital counseling services in religious institutions is KUA officers or P4K officers, Priest, or Pastor (Dhammanando et al., 2024). In line with this, religious counselors are reported to have a significant role because they can minimize divorce through premarital guidance (Juningsih & Syamsu, 2021).

There were only two specific problems reported by counselees; namely, counselees experiencing anxiety about marriage (Yuliarti & Karneli, 2020) and premarital anxiety (Wulandari & Fitriani, 2021). The nature of the client's problem determines how the problem is handled; this can be seen in clients who experience premarital anxiety who are helped by the scaling question technique. In previous research, anxiety experienced by prospective brides and grooms could be treated with relaxation therapy with systematic desensitization techniques (Rofiq et al., 2022). The strategies or interventions used in premarital counseling vary, as seen in Table 2. Of all the strategies or interventions described, two can be identified, namely interventions in the form of providing information and interventions in handling problems with special techniques, such as client centers and scaling questions. Other particular interventions, for example, use relaxation therapy with systematic desensitization techniques, which have been proven to be effective in reducing anxiety in prospective brides and grooms (Rofiq et al., 2022).

According to Clyde et al. (2019), providing information is a form of intervention usually carried out in educational or educational counseling. Meanwhile, handling problems with special techniques is a form of intervention that is usually carried out in premarital counseling or premarital counseling. Counseling strategies or interventions can be effective whether in the form of providing information or handling problems with special techniques. It is because these strategies focus on their respective goals.

The results of premarital education counseling, as seen in Table 2, vary; intervention providing information increases knowledge about marriage (Surtiati & Rani, 2022) and readiness to enter marriage (Sari et al., 2022). Meanwhile, interventions in handling problems using special techniques have shown reduced anxiety (Wulandari & Fitriani, 2021) and increased optimism in facing marriage (Yuliarti & Karneli, 2020). Overall, the results of the premarital educational counseling strategy mainly affect the increase in the knowledge and readiness of the prospective bride and groom to enter marriage, as well as the overcoming of particular problems experienced by the prospective brides.

## Conclusion

An overview of premarital counseling practices in Indonesia based on the results and discussion shows that premarital counseling practices in Indonesia use more group counseling models than individual counseling models. Counselors in premarital counseling are in their teens and early adulthood. The counseling strategy that is widely used is providing information; therefore, this program can be called educational counseling. The impact of providing the information is an increase in knowledge, which has implications for the counselee's readiness to face marriage. Future researchers should include studying premarital counseling material, considering that no standard curriculum or material represents groups of students and prospective brides and grooms.

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