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ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS COUNSELORS' STRATEGIES AND CHALLENGES IN PROMOTING FAMILY HARMONY: A Case Study in the Socio-Culturally Diverse Rural Context of Hinai Subdistrict-Indonesia

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Abstract: *A harmonious family serves as a foundational pillar in fostering a stable and prosperous society. This study investigates the roles, strategies, challenges, and impacts of Islamic religious counselors in promoting family harmony in Tanjung Mulia Village, Hinai Subdistrict, Langkat Regency—an area marked by socio-cultural diversity and limited access to formal state services. Using a qualitative descriptive method, data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation involving the Head of KUA, religious counselors, village leaders, and married couples. Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman model, involving data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing, with triangulation and peer review ensuring validity and reliability. Findings reveal that counselors serve not only as spiritual advisors but also as social facilitators and informal psychological support agents. Structured programs such as BRUS (School-Age Youth Guidance), BRUN (Marriage-Age Youth Guidance), and post-marriage counseling address mental, emotional, and spiritual readiness for family life. Strategies include five stages: planning, task distribution, implementation, evaluation, and reporting. Counseling is conducted in schools, prisons, mosques, and community centers, reflecting adaptability and reach. Key challenges include limited funding, low community literacy, inadequate infrastructure, and weak inter-agency collaboration. Nevertheless, the programs yield positive outcomes, such as improved spousal communication, enhanced role understanding, and reduced early marriage. Compared to formal state services, religious counselors provide grassroots, preventive family support that fills critical gaps. To optimize impact, this study recommends: (1) integrating counseling with national family programs, (2) enhancing counselor training in psychosocial and gender-sensitive skills, and (3) funding local-level initiatives. These findings offer transferable models for similar rural contexts.*

Keywords: *Islamic Counselors; Islamic Family Counseling; Harmonious Family; Marriage Preparation; Rural Muslim Community.*

INTRODUCTION

Household harmony is an important foundation in forming a healthy and prosperous society (Prayogi & Jauhari, 2021). The characteristics of a harmonious family include a friendly home atmosphere, attention and affection between family members, good communication, and appreciation of changes and developments that occur in the family (Indra, 2022). Maintaining family relationships in order to remain harmonious is the responsibility of a married couple in order to maintain the continuity of marriage (Ilham, 2018). Family harmony is the desire of every married couple, but to realize this desire requires effort that is not easy and must go through long processes and self-adjustment between husband and wife (Purwanto, 2022).

A family must be based on compassion, mutual understanding, love, and peace in order to realize a harmonious household. Husband and wife in the family have a big role in creating or realizing harmony (Hakiki, 2021). As described by Widyasari & Suyanto (2023), a harmonious family can be achieved if both husband and wife can carry out their roles and functions properly. Failure to carry out these roles will have a direct impact on household conditions, and in the long run can lead to disharmony and even separation. In this context, the role of religious instructors as educators (*Muraddib*) becomes very crucial (Nurkholis et al., 2020). Dewi (2018) explains that an instructor (*Murabbi*), is tasked with adding to the experience needed to maintain human survival for the achievement of life goals. An educator (*Muraddib*) ideally has a complete personality, mental maturity and likes to learn, especially knowledge in accordance with his duties and responsibilities (Himmawan & Hayati, 2021).

Religious instructors are in a strategic position as a link between religious teachings and the social reality of society (Muzakir, 2022). They are required to be able to communicate religious values in an effective and down-to-earth way (Inayah & Prihatini, 2022). Religious instructors also have the same obligations as government officials as public communicators (Sukandar et al., 2023), and are also required to master religious knowledge in order to encourage people's religious awareness in various aspects of life (Asyaari et al., 2024). In realizing a harmonious family, there are several characteristics that must be understood. Bagaskara (2023) reveals that a happy family has characteristics, namely the existence of peace of mind based on piety to God Almighty, harmonious relationships between saturated individuals and other individuals in the family and society, guaranteed physical, spiritual and social health, sufficient clothing, food and shelter, legal guarantees, especially human rights, the availability of reasonable education services, there is a guarantee in old age, so there is no need to worry about being neglected in the future, the availability of reasonable recreational facilities (Karmuji & Putra, 2020).

There are several other aspects to improve harmony in the family, namely spiritual well-being and minimizing conflict. According to Novianti et al. (2022), important aspects in realizing harmony in the family are mutual respect, love, communication attention, having time in the family, improving spiritual well-being and minimizing conflict in the household (Dzulfaqqor, 2018). In line with that, Nurhana (2023) states that a harmonious or prosperous family is an important goal that every couple must strive for. To achieve this,

it is necessary to pay attention to several key factors, one of which is attention, namely putting hearts and caring for all family members as the main basis for good relationships between them. Nurhana also emphasizes the importance of knowing and understanding each family member, including being aware of any changes that occur so that unwanted events can be anticipated early (Afrida, 2022). Among the aspects that support the realization of family harmony, quality time spent together, effective communication between family members, mutual respect, lack of conflict both in quality and quantity, and the existence of a strong emotional connection or bond between family members (Nuraini, 2023).

However, these ideals are often challenged in rural communities such as Tanjung Mulia Village, Hinai Subdistrict, Langkat Regency. Data from the local KUA in 2023 recorded 42 reported cases of marital conflict, 15 of which ended in divorce. The majority of conflicts were triggered by poor communication, emotional fatigue, and economic stress—especially among families where the husband works outside the region. The lack of early intervention and limited access to formal psychological support further exacerbates the issue. In this case, the role of religious instructors as community facilitators and coaches in religious matters is needed to minimize conflict in family harmony. However, in this village, the role of religious instructors is not yet optimal. This can be seen from the number of families who report their problems directly to the KUA without ever being touched by the previous guidance process.

Previous studies on religious counselors in family development generally fall into three thematic trends. First, studies focusing on the effectiveness of religious counseling—such as Widodo (2019), who showed that religious educators successfully fostered *sakinah* families through lectures and home visits. Second, research highlighting implementation obstacles, as seen in Alam (2020), who emphasized the limited understanding of counselors' roles among communities in East Lampung. Third, studies on community reception and participation, such as Dzulfaqqor (2018), who revealed that although time constraints and participant numbers limited the outreach, personal and group-based counseling still had significant reach.

However, these studies tend to approach counseling as reactive or instructional in nature. What remains underexplored is the proactive and strategic role of Islamic counselors in preventive family guidance, especially within rural Muslim communities experiencing sociocultural transitions. Moreover, few studies apply a structured framework for understanding how counselors operate across informal settings like youth groups, correctional facilities, or community prayer circles.

This research addresses that gap by examining how Islamic religious counselors in Tanjung Mulia Village carry out structured strategies for fostering family harmony, what challenges they face in a rural and socioeconomically vulnerable environment, and how their efforts impact family dynamics. The study highlights not just the geographical uniqueness of Hinai Subdistrict but its conceptual urgency as a model for community-based religious intervention in similar rural Muslim contexts.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach, which is suitable for exploring social phenomena in their natural settings, particularly when the goal is to describe experiences, roles, and processes as perceived by participants (Moleong, 2015; Creswell, 2014). The qualitative descriptive method was chosen because it allows the researcher to explore and interpret the practical strategies and contextual challenges faced by Islamic religious counselors in fostering family harmony without imposing rigid theoretical frameworks. The unit of analysis in this research is the interaction between Islamic religious counselors and community members, particularly in the context of counseling activities that aim to improve family dynamics.

The research was conducted in Tanjung Mulia Village, Hinai Subdistrict, Langkat Regency in 2025. Data sources included both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected from informants using observation, interviews, and documentation techniques. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, targeting individuals with direct relevance to the counseling process. These included the Head of the KUA, two Islamic religious counselors, the village head, and six married couples who had participated in pre- or post-marital counseling. In total, 11 informants were involved (Sugiyono, 2010).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore participants' experiences and perceptions. Each interview lasted between 30 and 60 minutes, conducted over one to two sessions per informant, and was audio-recorded with consent. Interviews were later transcribed manually and reviewed for accuracy. The observation method involved non-participant observation of the counseling environment and public religious guidance events, while documentation included the analysis of guidance reports, local demographic data, and program manuals provided by the KUA (Tanzeh, 2009).

Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, which consists of three concurrent stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles et al., 2014). Data reduction was done by coding the transcripts thematically based on research objectives. Data display was arranged in matrices to compare responses across informants, and conclusion drawing was continuously refined through memoing and discussion. To ensure data validity, triangulation was applied across data sources (interviews, observation, and documents), types of informants (KUA officials, counselors, villagers), and methods (interview vs observation). Peer debriefing was conducted with two academic colleagues familiar with the field of Islamic education and rural sociology to enhance interpretive trustworthiness.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Islamic religious instructors play an active role in providing an understanding of Islamic household values, guiding the community in resolving family conflicts, and directing the younger generation to have mental and spiritual readiness in fostering a healthy household. Based on the results of research conducted in Tanjung Mulia Village, Hinai Subdistrict,

Langkat Regency, it is known that there are a number of families who experience disharmony, even leading to separation. Conflicts that arise are generally caused by a lack of communication due to the distance between the husband and wife living apart, especially because the head of the family works outside the area. In addition, there are also economic factors that cause housewives to feel burdened, which sometimes leads to conflict. In this context, the role of Islamic religious instructors becomes very important, especially in forming harmonious and religious families in rural communities that are slowly experiencing a shift in values due to modernization.

Based on interviews conducted with religious instructors in charge of the KUA of Hinai Subdistrict, it is known that religious instructors themselves are people who guide the community about religious teachings. However, not only about religion, it is also adaptive to the needs of the community. This is as stated by Mr. Abdul Fuad as the Person in Charge of Religious Counselors at the KUA of Hinai Subdistrict.

"Islamic religious instructors provide guidance to the community, both related to worship, social affairs, and government policies. Examples of government policies that are socialized by religious instructors include stunting prevention programs, eradicating online gambling, drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, and also strengthening religious moderation."

In line with the expression of Mrs. Darni Wahyuni as the Coordinator of Religious Counselors at the KUA of Hinai Subdistrict in her interview, which states that a religious counselor is someone who is assigned by the government to carry out guidance and counseling through a religious language approach, which can be by *da'wah bil bal, bil lisan*, and so on. In addition, Mr. Abdul Fuad also mentioned that religious instructors also have a very crucial role in guiding the community to create harmonious families in their respective households.

They are also active in educating school-age and marriage-age adolescents, so that they have mental and spiritual readiness before forming a household. This was conveyed by Mr. Abdul Fuad in the following interview.

"We also have a post-marriage guidance program called BRUS (School Age Youth Guidance) and BRUN (Marriage Age Youth Guidance). The participants are usually high school, Aliyah, or STM students - because at that age the desire to get married is quite high. The guidance discusses the ideal age of marriage, the rule of law (minimum age of 19 years), the importance of reproductive health, and mental readiness. All this is done to create a healthy and mature golden generation."

Based on this quote, it can be seen that the BRUS and BRUN programs are aimed at school-age adolescents, who have the desire to get married. It is necessary to educate them about marriage, starting from the ideal age for marriage, health, mental readiness, and others. Ms. Darni Wahyuni also added that guidance is not only for those who are getting married but there is also post-marriage guidance.

"Apart from BRUS and BUN, there is also post-marriage guidance. Because it is difficult to gather married couples, post-marital guidance is usually conducted at perwiritan activities."

Furthermore, religious instructors in Hinai Sub-district do not limit counseling to the KUA, but actively target strategic locations such as schools, mosques, majelis taklim groups, and correctional institutions. The approach is taken to reach all levels of society according to their respective needs and social conditions. This is as stated by Mr. Abdul Fuad below.

"Counseling is quite effective because there are forums available such as perwiran, mosque youth, schools, and even correctional institutions (Lapas). There we provide counseling on religion, health, and home life. Counseling is also conducted in hospitals and social institutions, such as in Tanjung Pura."

In an effort to form harmonious families, Islamic religious instructors in Hinai Sub-district implement a systematic and structured strategy. Mr. Abdul Fuad mentioned that the strategy is carried out with several steps. This was conveyed in the following interview.

"The strategy or steps taken include several stages. First, briefing or initial briefing. Second, the division of tasks. Third, the implementation of activities (action). Fourth, evaluation and report making. This report is then submitted to the Langkat District Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs through the extension coordinator and the person in charge."

The social and religious conditions in Hinai Sub-district are also one of the considerations in developing the extension strategy. Mr. Abdul Fuad mentioned that Hinai is classified as a vulnerable area in terms of faith, because there are several groups or sects that are not in line with the beliefs of the majority of the community. This was conveyed in the following interview. To anticipate the situation, extension workers do not only move alone, but collaborate with religious leaders, mosque administrators, and local religious organizations. This was conveyed by Mrs. Darni Wahyuni in the following interview.

"The anticipation efforts are carried out through several steps. First, we continue to routinely hold counseling activities. Second, involving religious leaders to provide guidance to the community. Third, holding Al-Hidayah recitations and establishing coordination with the Mosque Council which oversees mosque administrators in the Hinai sub-district."

These strategies show that religious counseling in Hinai Sub-district is not just a routine of delivering lectures, but part of a growing process of socio-religious development. The influence of one of the KUA's guidance programs, namely pre-marital guidance, shows positive results. The majority of informants who became research informants claimed to have participated in family guidance programs from the KUA, especially during the pre-marriage period. For example, Mr. Suheri, a resident of Hinai Sub-district, stated that he received guidance before the marriage contract, which at that time gave him an initial understanding of domestic life.

"Indeed, before the marriage or marriage contract, I was coached to build a family that is samawa. But that's all still theory, so after marriage a couple will be created. That's when I understood what sakinah, mawaddah, warohmah means."

Similarly, Mr. Rusliansyah also admitted to attending the pre-marital program held by the KUA in the area where he lives. He revealed that the material presented helped him understand the importance of emotional readiness and commitment in building a

household. Meanwhile, Mr. Julianto, a resident of Suka Damai Timur Village, mentioned that he attended the socialization program from the KUA held at the lurah office. According to him, the program provided practical insights into the roles of husband and wife in the family as well as the importance of communication and openness in the household.

"Alhamdulillah, the effect or impact is very positive. At least we understand and understand how the household is to maintain harmony with each other to get a family that is samawa. Because the husband is the priest in the family. That is the tremendous impact felt."

Although the harmonious family counseling program run by the KUA of Hinai Sub-district has shown a positive impact, its implementation still faces a number of obstacles. Based on interviews with Mr. Abdul Fuad and Ms. Darni Wahyuni, some of these challenges include: the lack of financial support for the counselors, the low welfare of the community, the unequal educational aspects of the community, the limited facilities and infrastructure, and the internal conditions and support in the households of the counseling participants. However, despite facing various obstacles, the extension workers in Hinai Sub-district still strive to provide the best service.

Discussion

The Role of Islamic Religious Counselors in Forming Harmonious Families

Islamic Religious Counselors are professions that play an important role in efforts to spread the spread of Islam to the community consciously and planned, with various good methods and in accordance with the Decree of the Minister of Religion (KMA) No. 3 of 1999 (Rafiah et al., 2022). Based on the research results, the role of religious instructors is not only limited to the delivery of normative religious teachings, but also adaptive and responsive to the needs and social problems that develop in the community. As stated by Mr. Abdul Fuad as the Person in Charge of Religious Counselors at the KUA of Hinai Subdistrict, religious instructors are tasked with providing guidance to the community in various aspects of life, including worship, social life, and even socialization of government policies. This role makes religious instructors an extension of the government in delivering strategic programs that are in direct contact with people's lives. Their role also reflects a comprehensive da'wah approach, which is not only through bil lisan (oral lectures), but also bil hal (exemplary and real actions), as explained by Mrs. Darni Wahyuni as the Coordinator of Religious Counselors in Hinai Subdistrict.

The Strategy of Islamic Religious Counselors in Forming Harmonious Families

Islamic religious instructors at the KUA of Hinai Sub-district also play a strategic role in shaping family resilience through counseling conducted through a systematic and structured approach. The strategy used reflects a planned and participatory managerial process, which can be described in the following five steps:

1. Briefing or Initial Briefing

This initial stage is carried out to equalize the vision and understanding between extension workers regarding the theme of the activity, the objectives of the extension,

and the field conditions that will be faced. This initial briefing can be equated with the planning stage in management theory. In the context of organizational management, planning is a very crucial basic stage because it determines the direction and success of an activity. According to Nurislamiah (2021), planning includes aspects of “what to do, when to do it, how to do it and who does it”. This means that strategizing from the start must contain clarity regarding the target of the activity, the method of implementation, the time, and the specific division of roles. This is where early direction is important - without a structured vision and work plan, extension activities will lose their direction and effectiveness will decline. In this context, the active participation of extension workers in the initial briefing is an important part of the internalization process of shared responsibility. This strategy also reflects the collaborative principle in the da'wah approach, where success is not only determined by the individual, but also by the team solidity and synergy built among the extension workers.

2. Division of Tasks

After the briefing, the division of tasks was carried out in accordance with the competencies and roles of each extension worker. This is done so that the tasks of the extension workers become lighter, more focused, and directed. This division emphasizes teamwork, where each member has their own responsibilities but complements each other. Cooperation in management groups is also based on mutual trust, respect, and respect to achieve common goals through the division of roles, responsibilities, and mutual support (Fadillah et al., 2025). In addition, this teamwork is also in line with Islamic teachings which emphasize helping each other, namely helping each other in terms of goodness because if a job is done together, there will be strong togetherness and goals will be easily achieved (Arsyad & Rama, 2019). This also affects the work enthusiasm and internal motivation of extension workers in carrying out their duties, which in turn has an impact on the quality and sustainability of religious development programs in the community.

3. Activity Implementation

The next stage is activity implementation or direct execution in the field. In Hinai Sub-district, this activity is not one-dimensional, but is carried out in various forms to adapt to the heterogeneous characteristics of the community. The practice of counseling by the KUA of Hinai Sub-district is also not limited to the KUA environment. Counselors actively go to strategic locations such as schools, mosques, community groups, and even correctional institutions (Lapas). This step is a form of a ball pick-up approach, where the counselor seeks to be directly present in the midst of the community, reaching all levels more broadly and evenly. One form of activity that is quite prominent in implementation in the field is counseling for school-age and marriage-age youth. Based on an interview with Mr. Abdul Fuad as the Person in Charge of Religious Counselors at the KUA of Hinai Subdistrict, it is known that the counselors actively provide education about the readiness to build a household, both in terms of age, mental, spiritual, and health. This program is known as BRUS (Guidance for School-Age Teenagers) and BRUN (Guidance for Marriage-Age Teenagers).

Furthermore, as stated by Mrs. Darni Wahyuni as the Coordinator of Religious Counselors, guidance is not only given to prospective brides or teenagers, but also to married couples. Post-marital guidance is generally conducted informally, such as through pengajian or perwiritan activities, given the difficulty of gathering married couples on a scheduled basis. This strategy is considered effective in building closeness and conveying religious values in a context that is more concrete and relevant to everyday life. This implementation strategy shows that religious instructors do not only act as conveyors of religious information, but also as agents of change.

4. Evaluation

After the activities have been implemented, the next step is evaluation, where the extension workers conduct a comprehensive assessment process of the activities that have been carried out. The results showed that the evaluation aims to identify the extent to which the material delivered by the extension workers is accepted by the community, as well as assessing the real impact. It is important to know whether the extension material really touches the real problems faced by the community, or still needs to be adjusted to be more contextual and relevant. The results of the evaluation can be used as feedback for Islamic religious instructors in improving and perfecting subsequent guidance programs and activities (Fajar, 2020). This evaluation is in line with the theory of experiential learning, which makes experience one of the sources of learning (Jayanti & Ariawan, 2018). The learning process involves real experience, direct interaction with a particular environment, situation or task, and deep reflection on the experience (Sulaiman et al., 2024). Therefore, religious extension workers in Hinai Sub-district do not only act as one-way preachers, but also as active learners who continuously strive to improve their preaching methods based on their experiences and direct observations in the field.

5. Reporting

Reporting is the final stage of a series of strategies carried out by Islamic religious instructors in Hinai Subdistrict. After the extension activities are carried out and evaluated, the whole process is then summarized and outlined in the form of a written report that is formal and systematic. This report was compiled by the extension workers, then submitted to the Extension Coordinator to be forwarded to the Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Langkat Regency.

With this five-step strategy, religious instructors in Hinai Sub-district play a dual role as preachers, educators, and social facilitators. The strategy is not just to deliver material, but also to build deep social relationships and foster community awareness to realize a family that is *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah*.

The Impact of Religious Activities Program of Religious Counselors of the KUA of Hinai Subdistrict

Based on the results of research conducted through interviews with the community of Hinai Subdistrict, it can be concluded that the religious programs run by KUA religious instructors have a real positive impact on the formation of harmonious families. In an

interview with Mr. Suheri, it was found that his participation in premarital guidance by the KUA provided an important understanding of the values of a *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah* family. He said that honesty, mutual trust, and respect for the opinions of spouses and children are the main foundations in creating family harmony. She also emphasized that being the head of the household does not mean having absolute power, but rather having to remain humble, open, and prioritize love in resolving conflicts. This is in line with Nurislamiah's (2021) view that open communication between couples will maintain household harmony. According to Cahyani et al. (2024) openness in a relationship is defined as the ability to express one's feelings, needs, and fears so that it is closely related to the relationship.

Mrs. Tria and Mrs. Wati also felt a similar impact. According to Ms. Tria, the pre-marital counseling she and her husband attended equipped them with important insights on healthy communication, mutual respect, and unemotional conflict resolution. She also felt an improvement in understanding the roles and responsibilities as a wife, husband, and parent. She considered the follow-up program from the KUA to be very helpful to continue to improve themselves and strengthen family values. In line with Mrs. Wati who said that the KUA program was very helpful in improving the quality of communication in her household. After attending pre-marital counseling and guidance, she and her husband became more open, less easily provoked by emotions, and better understood the importance of cooperation and affection in building a family. The program also provided important provisions for her in carrying out her role as a wife and mother, and encouraged the formation of a *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah* family.

Meanwhile, Mr. Ruliansyah, who also participated in the premarital program, stated that the activity gave him a new understanding of the importance of commitment in building a household. He said he learned a lot about the age of maturity for marriage, the roles of husband and wife, and the importance of understanding and being open to each other in married life. She also emphasized that one of the biggest challenges in families is social pressure from the environment and neighbors, but through the mentorship program, she realized the importance of focusing on commitment and communication in the family. According to Hakim (2025), there are several external factors that can affect family stability, such as social, economic, external intervention, and politics.

This finding reinforces the concept of Aswan (2023), that attention and knowledge about self and family members play an important role in maintaining household harmony. Religious programs from the KUA have succeeded in becoming a source of in-depth knowledge about the roles of husband and wife, so that couples are better prepared to face household dynamics. This is also in line with Damariyanto (2024) who underlines the importance of communication and parental attitudes in maintaining family integrity.

A similar opinion was expressed by Julianto, who also participated in family guidance from the KUA. According to him, transparency in various aspects of family life, including the economy and children's education, is the main key in creating harmony. He felt that the socialization from the KUA was very useful in providing an Islamic as well as national perspective in fostering the family. Through this approach, she understands that the

husband's position as imam does not mean absolute dominance, but rather moral and spiritual responsibility in guiding the family towards a *sakinah* family. This is in line with Luthfi (2024) who mentions the importance of adequate clothing, food and shelter as well as motivation for education in the family.

Overall, the impact felt by the informants shows that the religious program provided by the religious extension workers of the KUA of Hinai Sub-district has a positive impact on their families. The program provides theoretical and practical provision on how to build a spiritually, emotionally and socially healthy household. The emphasized values such as honesty, openness, communication, and balanced roles between husband and wife have become important foundations in living family life.

Challenges of Religious Counselors of the KUA of Hinai Subdistrict in Forming Harmonious Families

Although the harmonious family counseling program implemented by the Islamic religious counselors of the KUA of Hinai Subdistrict has shown various positive impacts, the implementation process in the field does not always run smoothly. The extension workers are faced with various challenges, both from the internal institutional side and from the characteristics of the community as beneficiaries. One of the main challenges is the welfare of the extension workers themselves. Many of the extension workers, especially those who are not civil servants or have not been appointed as PPPK, only receive a very limited honorarium. This condition jeopardizes work motivation, especially when extension services require a lot of energy, time, and operational costs.

The socioeconomic condition of the community is also a dominant external inhibiting factor. In the midst of a community that is still struggling to meet basic needs such as food and health, counseling on the role of parents, family communication, or the importance of children's education is sometimes considered secondary. This shows that programs aimed at encouraging changes in family behavior cannot be separated from the context of community welfare itself. This finding is in line with Marzuki & Udi (2023) who stated that the economy plays an important role in forming a prosperous household. Families with a stable economy are able to fulfill their basic needs and develop towards an independent, harmonious, and resilient life. If basic needs are not met, it is very difficult for families to focus on more ideal things such as strengthening religious values or parenting.

In addition to economic factors, extension workers also face challenges in terms of uneven levels of education and community literacy. Many extension participants have low educational backgrounds, so their understanding of extension materials varies. This requires extension workers to have communication skills that are able to convey material in a language that is easy to understand. This is because the communication process in counseling is not merely the transfer of messages from the extension agent/communicator to the target group or communicant, but how the message can be received, understood by the target group so that an awareness arises, which continues to interest, desire to consider, and try to apply the message conveyed by the extension agent/communicator with his own awareness (Rahman, 2021). Therefore, effective counseling depends not only on the

content of the material, but also on the method of delivery that suits the level of understanding of the audience.

Not only that, limited infrastructure and accessibility are also real obstacles. Not all areas in Hinai Sub-district have public facilities or adequate transportation, so the mobility of extension workers is often hampered. Nevertheless, the high dedication of the extension workers remains visible, even in conditions that lack material support. On the other hand, the success of the extension program is not only determined by the extension workers, but also depends on the active participation of families as the main subject of change. The counseling materials that have been delivered will not have a significant impact if they are not accompanied by the willingness of the family to apply these values in their daily lives.

From the community's perspective, building a harmonious family also has its own challenges. Mrs. Tria expressed differences of opinion with her husband on how to educate children and manage finances, as well as physical and emotional exhaustion due to household responsibilities. She overcomes these challenges by being patient, maintaining communication with her husband, and getting closer to God. Ibu Wati also faces differences in views with her husband and changes in children's behavior as they get older. She overcame this with patience, open communication with her spouse, and firm but loving parenting. Physical fatigue also often affects her emotional stability, but she tries to manage her emotions so as not to trigger conflict.

These results suggest that the success of an extension program depends not only on how effective the extension worker is, but also on how prepared and actively involved the families are. The material presented will not have a big impact if the family does not apply it consciously. Despite facing various challenges, the religious extension workers of the KUA of Hinai Sub-district remain committed to carrying out their duties. Based on the results of the research, some positive results began to appear, such as the decline in cases of early marriage due to out-of-wedlock pregnancy and the increase in community understanding of the values of *sakinah*, *mawaddah* and *rahmah* in the household. This condition confirms that despite the limitations, the role of extension workers remains crucial as a catalyst for the formation of harmonious families.

CONCLUSION

Islamic religious instructors at the KUA of Hinai Subdistrict play a crucial role in shaping harmonious families in rural communities. Their functions extend beyond conveying religious teachings to serving as facilitators of social and emotional development through structured counseling programs such as BRUS, BRUN, and post-marital guidance. These initiatives are conducted in diverse community settings including schools, mosques, taklim assemblies, and correctional facilities, following a five-stage strategy: initial briefing, task distribution, implementation, evaluation, and reporting.

Evidence from the field confirms that these programs have yielded meaningful impacts. Respondents reported stronger spousal communication, improved understanding of family roles, and a noticeable decline in early marriages caused by unplanned pregnancies.

Such outcomes indicate that the counseling provided by religious instructors contributes significantly to promoting the core values of *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah* within families.

Nonetheless, several key challenges continue to hinder program effectiveness. The most pressing issue is limited financial support, particularly for non-permanent counselors who receive minimal incentives. This is followed by low literacy levels and educational disparities that make it difficult for certain groups to engage fully in the programs. Infrastructural limitations and inconsistent family support further reduce the long-term effectiveness of these efforts.

To address these challenges, several priority actions are recommended. First, funding allocations and operational support must be increased, especially from the Ministry of Religious Affairs and local governments. Second, training for counselors should be enhanced—particularly in psychosocial, gender-sensitive, and communication strategies—through collaboration with universities and NGOs. Third, it is essential to foster cross-sectoral collaboration that involves village leaders, health centers, schools, and religious organizations to mainstream family counseling into broader community development programs. Additionally, delivery methods should be adapted to local contexts by utilizing vernacular language, storytelling, and interactive media to ensure accessibility, especially in low-literacy areas. Finally, families should be encouraged to participate actively in every stage of counseling, from planning to post-session follow-ups, to increase program ownership and sustainability. With stronger institutional support, tailored approaches, and deepened community engagement, religious counseling can serve as a transformative force in building resilient, harmonious families in rural Muslim societies like Hinai.

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