

Prevention Of Early Marriage As An Effort To Overcome Stunting

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Abstract.

Early marriage is a significant social issue that can have a negative impact on the health and well-being of teenagers, and has the potential to exacerbate the problem of stunting among children. This activity aims to outline community service activities focused on preventing early marriage as a strategy to reduce the prevalence of stunting. One of the institutions that is expected to be a pioneer in implementing activities to prevent early marriage and overcome stunting in West Nusa Tenggara is the Faculty of Maritime Medicine, Mataram University. The activity is aimed at identifying risk factors for early marriage and their impact on the incidence of stunting. This activity was carried out by providing counseling, attended by 40 teenagers who were grade 9 students and 5 teachers at MTs Nurul Huda, Pijot Village, Keruak District, East Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara Province. The results of this service activity show an increase in understanding regarding the risks of early marriage and stunting, as well as a change in attitudes towards education and health. In conclusion, efforts to prevent early marriage have proven effective in supporting efforts to overcome stunting, by having a significant impact on improving the health and welfare conditions of teenagers and children. It is hoped that this program can become a model for similar community service activities in the future.

Keywords: *Early marriage and stunting.*

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the biggest social and health problems in Indonesia is early marriage. By definition, any marriage entered into before a person reaches the legal age of 18 is considered an early marriage. Both boys and girls can marry early, but generally in many countries around the world, girls marry earlier than boys and older people (Unicef, 2014). In Indonesia, early marriage is often associated with various factors such as poverty, gender inequality and cultural norms. Marriage in Indonesia is regulated in Law Number 16 of 2019 which states that the age at which individuals can marry is 19 years for women and men (Development & State, 2019). Early marriage has a significant impact on individual and family well-being, especially in the context of children's health and development. One of the prominent negative impacts is an increase in the risk of stunting in children. Stunting, or a growth disorder that causes a child's height to be lower than age standards, is a serious problem that can affect a child's health and quality of life in the long term. Stunting is often caused by malnutrition and infection, but social factors such as early marriage also play an important role. In the context of early marriage, women who marry at a young age often face major challenges related to health and well-being.

They tend to experience pregnancy and childbirth at an age that is not yet fully physically mature, which can increase the risk of health complications, including nutritional disorders for pregnant women and babies. As a result, children born to mothers who marry early may experience malnutrition and stunting, which in turn can impact their cognitive development, education and productivity in the future. The trend of early marriage in developing countries varies, from the highest rate of 70.0% in South Asia to the lowest rate of 30.0% in Southeast Asia. According to UNICEF (www.unicef.org, 2020). Indonesia ranks second in the world for child marriage. In 2018, 11.2% of Indonesian women married at the age of 20–24 years out of a population of 627 million. Additionally, 4.8% of girls married when they were less than 17 years old; 1.8% of girls under the age of 16 are married, and 0.6% of girls under the age of 15 are married. In other words,

one in nine girls under the age of 18 is married prematurely. Due to its alarming size and consequences, the case of early marriage in Indonesia has long been of concern to many parties.

The national rate of early marriage reaches 25.7%. This means that out of every 100 marriages, 25 involve minors (Arimurti and Nurmalita, 2017). Stunting, also known as dwarfism, is a condition in which children experience reduced physical growth, usually measured by a height that is lower than age standards. Long-term malnutrition, recurrent infections, and malnutrition early in life are often causes of stunting. This condition affects children's physical growth and cognitive development (Lakshmi et al., 2024). According to 2023 Riskesdas (Basic Health Research) data, the prevalence of early marriage in Indonesia is still a significant problem. Data shows that around 10.8% of girls aged 15-19 are married, with higher variations in rural areas and certain provinces. Meanwhile, the stunting rate in Indonesia in 2023 will reach around 24.2% in children under five, indicating that almost one in four children is stunted (Ministry of Health, 2023). In this context, it is important to understand and address the factors that cause early marriage and stunting as part of a public health strategy. Through appropriate prevention and intervention programs, it is hoped that it can reduce the prevalence of early marriage and reduce stunting rates, as well as improve the welfare of society as a whole.

II. ACTIVITY METHODS

This counseling will be carried out using several methods to ensure information is conveyed effectively, the first activity is an information presentation that outlines facts and data related to early marriage and stunting, including its impact on children's health and education, then continued with group discussions and participants are divided into small groups to discuss the challenges they face and share solutions that are considered successful in preventing early marriage and stunting. Next is a simulation and role play session to demonstrate real situations, so that participants can understand how to deal with this problem in the context of everyday life and the last is an interactive question and answer session where participants can ask questions and get answers directly from doctors, as well as discuss issues. -specific issues that may not have been discussed.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The activity was held on August 3 2024. Participants in the activity were class IX students and teachers at MTs Nurul Huda, Pijot Village. In its implementation, this service activity involved Mataram University KKN students as committee members and 40 teenagers who were grade 9 students and 5 teachers as participants. The activity began with an opening by the chief executive as well as an introduction to the implementing members of the Mataram University KKN Integrated Development Post program. The day before the activity, participants were informed not to have breakfast on the day and to eat no later than 10 pm. The next stage was the provision of material by Dr. Nurman Saputra who represented the FKIK of Marine Medicine, Mataram University regarding preventing early marriage as an effort to overcome stunting.



Fig 1. Providing material by doctors from the Mataram University marine medicine team

During the counseling process, interviews were also conducted with students regarding their knowledge and views on early marriage. From the results of the discussion, it turned out that student's knowledge regarding early marriage was very minimal and indeed there had already been early marriages for 2 students in 2024.



Fig 2. Question and answer session and discussion

This is supported by data from the Central Statistics Agency which shows that the rate of early marriage in Indonesia in 2018 increased to 15.6% from 14.2% compared to the previous year. The provinces with the highest percentage of early marriages are South Kalimantan (22.8%), West Java (20.9%), and East Java (20.7%) (Arimurti & Nurmala, 2017). In 2020, data from the Central Statistics Agency shows that West Nusa Tenggara has the highest rate of early marriage among Indonesian provinces. This is 28.66% of all teenagers under 18 years of age (BPS, 2020).

Table 1. BPS data processed by the author (BPS, 2021)

10 Indonesian provinces with the highest rates of early marriage in 2020

	Provinsi	Persentase	Perubahan 2018-2020 (%)
1	Sulawesi Barat	33,41%	0,84
2	Kalimantan Tengah	31,50%	-0,24
3	Kalimantan Selatan	30,66%	0,08
4	Nusa Tenggara Barat	28,66%	-1,26
5	Kalimantan Barat	28,64%	0,57
6	Bangka Belitung	28,25%	0,97
7	Maluku Utara	28,20%	0,73
8	Sulawesi tengah	28,09%	-0,46
9	Sulawesi Tenggara	27,97%	-1,54
10	Sulawesi Utara	27,80%	1,49

The participation of students and teachers in efforts to prevent early marriage as an effort to overcome stunting is an important effort to control diseases related to maternal and child health. The relationship between early marriage and stunting is very close. Women who marry at a young age tend to have a higher risk of preterm pregnancy and birth, as well as facing nutritional problems that affect their health and that of the child they are born with. Poor maternal health and lack of access to health services and adequate education often contribute to high rates of stunting among children born to mothers who marry early (Duana et al., 2022). A study was conducted from September to November 2019 at the Grogol Petamburan District Health Center, Wijaya Kusuma Sector on 130 toddlers aged between 24 and 59 months with a cross-sectional research design. This study found that the prevalence of early marriage was 38.5% and the stunting rate was 40%. There is a significant correlation between early marriage and the incidence of stunting. In mothers who married before the age of 18 years, stunting was found in 29 children (58%) while the remaining 21 (42%) did not. In mothers who did not marry before the age of 18 years, stunting was found in 23 children under five (28.7%) while the remaining 57 (71.3%) did not experience it (Restiana & Fadilah, 2022). Early marriage can cause the first pregnancy to occur at an early age, thus affecting the mother's readiness to care for her children and having poor reproductive health.

This results in children being born with a low risk of life and a greater chance of getting nutritional problems such as stunting (Modak, 2018). Stunting generally occurs during the first two years of a child's life. Due to maternal malnutrition, malnutrition in children can appear during fetal development during pregnancy (Irwansyah et al., 2016), so maternal nutrition both before and during pregnancy is very important for a healthy pregnancy (Victora et al., 2021). Another impact for mothers due to early marriage is the risk of losing the opportunity to continue their education, making them unable to achieve a higher level. As a result, the parenting practices provided by the mother are not good. The long-term impact is the loss of opportunities to get work and income to fulfill children's nutrition (KPPPA and BPS, 2019). Knowledge about the negative impacts of early marriage is not only for students and teachers, but is intended for people who still do not understand the importance of getting married at a sufficient age. Through counseling groups, those at risk of the impact of early marriage can be prevented early with active counseling, health counseling for young women, and then providing education. The educational material provided includes male and female reproductive health, changes in adolescent behavior to reduce out-of-wedlock pregnancies and the importance of preparation before a woman becomes pregnant.



Fig 3. Teacher participation as educators

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

1. Based on the results of interviews and open discussions with grade 9 students at MTs Nurul Huda, Pijot Village, it was found that 2 students, 1 male and 1 female, had had early marriages.
2. It was also found that the factor that influenced this incident was the local village culture which still adheres to the belief that women do not need higher education and that early marriage is still normal and occurs frequently.
3. Early marriages in the village are also supported by the practice of unregistered marriages which are not registered with the religious affairs office (KUA) so that early marriages continue to take place.
4. Minimal knowledge about adolescent reproductive health also plays a role in the incidence of pregnancy out of wedlock which makes it necessary for the marriage to take place.
5. Efforts to prevent early marriage have proven effective in supporting efforts to overcome stunting, by having a significant impact on improving the health and welfare conditions of teenagers and children.
6. It is hoped that this program can become a model for similar community service activities in the future.

Suggestion

1. Outreach activities regarding reproductive health in schools should be scheduled regularly and periodically and facilitated by the school.
2. Optimizing the role of educational staff as the front guard in preventing the practice of early marriage.
3. Optimize the role of health workers as educators and officers who actively make efforts to prevent stunting in Pijot Village.

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