Enhancing Marriage Age Awareness through Comprehensive Sexuality Education: A Multicultural Approach in Rural Aluh-Aluh Besar, Kabupaten Banjar, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the attitudes and perceptions of early marriage within Aluh-aluh Besar Village, South Kalimantan, and evaluates the potential of a multicultural approach in comprehensive sexuality education. The study aims to understand the cultural, emotional, and socio-economic factors that influence early marriage decisions and explore how integrating diverse cultural perspectives can enhance sexual education programs. Using a mixed-methods approach, including surveys and interviews with community members and educators, the research gathers insights into local traditions, the emotional benefits perceived from early marriage, and the role of employment and multiculturalism in shaping these views. Findings indicate that early marriage is deeply rooted in cultural traditions and is often seen as providing emotional stability and protection from perceived risks. Economic stability and multicultural factors also play significant roles in its acceptance. The study highlights the need for culturally sensitive educational programs that address these factors and promote informed decision-making about the appropriate age for marriage. The evaluation underscores the importance of incorporating diverse cultural perspectives to effectively implement comprehensive sexuality education. The findings suggest that socioeconomic, biological, and cultural factors influence the awareness of the appropriate age for marriage, and the lack of such awareness can lead to adverse outcomes. The study concludes that addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach, including education, legal reforms, and cultural shifts, while also considering the role of personal responsibility in decision-making.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) is crucial in raising awareness about the appropriate age for marriage and its associated sexual and reproductive health rights and responsibilities. CSE provides scientifically accurate, realistic, and nonjudgmental information, which is essential for young people to make informed decisions about their lives and futures (Machawira et al., 2020; Mullinax et al., 2017). It is particularly important in regions like Eastern and Southern Africa, where young people face significant sexual and reproductive health challenges, including high rates of early and unintended pregnancies (EUP) and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Interestingly, while CSE is designed to address these issues, its implementation can face significant challenges. For instance, evaluations of school-based life skills or HIV education programs have shown that these programs often struggle to move beyond imparting knowledge to actually developing psychosocial skills, attitudes, and behaviors (Machawira et al., 2020). Moreover, despite the proven effectiveness of CSE in positively influencing sexual health-related behaviors, providing such education in schools can be controversial, and there is a need for a supportive environment for its implementation (Mullinax et al., 2017).

Comprehensive sexuality education plays a pivotal role in enhancing marriage age awareness and promoting healthy sexual behaviors. It is supported by evidence that suggests positive impacts on reducing STIs, HIV, and unintended pregnancy, and does not hasten sexual activity but rather encourages safer sexual behaviors and can delay sexual debut (Machawira et al., 2020). The successful implementation of CSE requires overcoming barriers and ensuring that the curriculum is inclusive, culturally sensitive, and addresses the needs of all youth, including marginalized groups (Koch et al., 2024). Therefore, it is imperative to continue advocating for and scaling up comprehensive sexuality education to improve health outcomes for young people globally (Braeken & Cardinal, 2008).

The relevance of a multicultural approach in sexuality education is underscored by the recognition that cultural competence is a critical aspect of educational discourse, aiming to create inclusive environments that respect diverse backgrounds and experiences (Eden et al., 2024). This is particularly pertinent in regions like South India, where the integration of cultural diversity in schools is essential for fostering an inclusive learning atmosphere and promoting cross-cultural understanding. Interestingly, while comprehensive sexuality education has evolved to include topics like sexual diversity, it has also faced opposition from conservative groups who argue against its progressive values (Slominski, 2021). Moreover, the barriers to sexual and reproductive health rights in diverse socio-cultural contexts highlight the need for culturally sensitive education that respects young people's rights to informed decision-making (Mahajan, 2019). The inclusion of sexual pleasure in comprehensive sexuality education, advocated by the WAS Declaration, further emphasizes the need for an inclusive approach that addresses a broad spectrum of sexual outcomes and experiences (Mark et al., 2021). A multicultural approach in sexuality education is relevant as it aligns with the broader goals of cultural competence in education, addresses the diverse needs of students, and supports their right to informed sexual and reproductive health decision-making. It is essential for educational policies and curricula to reflect this commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, thereby empowering students to navigate their sexual health with respect for cultural differences and personal rights

Understanding the appropriate age for marriage, or "kesadaran usia perkawinan," is crucial as it has significant implications for individuals' health, social status, and

economic well-being. The age at which individuals marry can affect their educational and career opportunities, as well as have health implications, particularly for women (Palamuleni, 2011; Radwan et al., 2021). Several factors influence the awareness of the appropriate age for marriage. Socioeconomic determinants such as education, ethnicity, and premarital work duration have been shown to impact the timing of marriage (Lee, 1982). Additionally, biological factors like age at menarche can also play a role (Forman et al., 2013). Cultural and legal frameworks, such as those in Indonesia, can create paradoxes that affect marriage age awareness and practices (Rismana et al., 2024).

The perception of early marriage and its consequences varies between urban and rural settings, with rural areas showing a higher prevalence of early marriage (Radwan et al., 2021). The lack of awareness regarding the appropriate age for marriage can lead to early marriage, which is associated with adverse outcomes such as higher fertility rates, lower status of women, and increased health risks for mothers and children (Palamuleni, 2011). Furthermore, early marriage can perpetuate cycles of poverty and limit educational and economic opportunities (Radwan et al., 2021). In societies where legal reforms have been implemented to address these issues, a lack of socialization and awareness can undermine the effectiveness of such reforms (Rismana et al., 2024). In summary, awareness of the appropriate age for marriage is influenced by a complex interplay of socioeconomic, biological, and cultural factors. The consequences of a lack of such awareness are multifaceted, affecting individual and societal well-being. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach that includes education, legal reforms, and cultural shifts to ensure that individuals can make informed decisions about marriage (Palamuleni, 2011; Radwan et al., 2021; Rismana et al., 2024).

While these suggestions are important, it is also crucial to consider the role of personal responsibility in addressing these issues. Individuals must take ownership of their decisions and be held accountable for the consequences of their actions. Sexual education, particularly comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), can help address a range of sexual and reproductive health issues. CSE provides scientifically accurate information, non-judgmental attitudes, and culturally relevant approaches to teaching about sex and relationships, which are important for improving adolescent sexual health outcomes (Mullinax et al., 2017). CSE is also recognized to reduce HIV prevalence by providing appropriate knowledge on sexual and reproductive health education (Olufadewa et al., 2021).

Interestingly, despite evidence supporting the effectiveness of CSE, its implementation is often met with challenges. In Nigeria, for example, cultural barriers, conservative values and religious beliefs have created hurdles in the implementation of CSE programs (Miller, 2023). In Zambia, perceptions of the effectiveness of CSE in reducing child sexual abuse and teenage pregnancy varied among teachers and students, suggesting that a more integrated approach in the curriculum and guidance and counseling services may be needed (Hawkins, 2024). Overall, sexual education, especially CSE, can help address sexual and reproductive health issues by raising awareness, reducing risky behaviors, and supporting adolescents' sexual rights. However, challenges in the implementation and acceptance of CSE must be addressed through evidence-based advocacy, youth engagement, and inclusive education that addresses the needs of previously marginalized groups.

As such, sexual education can be an important tool in promoting better sexual and reproductive health worldwide Aluh-aluh Besar Village, located in Banjar Regency, South Kalimantan, is a densely populated settlement. The life of the people in this village still

relies heavily on the agricultural sector as the backbone of the economy. Despite this, the village has untapped tourism potential, with a variety of interesting tourist destinations that can be developed. However, behind the promising economic potential, Desa Aluh-aluh Besar faces serious social challenges. Community awareness and understanding of the ideal age of marriage is still relatively low. This situation creates vulnerability to the practice of early marriage, which is still quite high in the village. Lack of knowledge about the negative impacts of young marriage, both in terms of health, education and socioeconomics, is a major factor that perpetuates the practice.

This condition is exacerbated by limited access to comprehensive sexual education. Communities, especially adolescents, do not have sufficient understanding of reproductive health and the long-term consequences of early marriage. This creates a cycle that is difficult to break, where lack of knowledge leads to poor decision-making regarding marriage and family life. The situation in Aluh-aluh Besar Village reflects the urgent need for holistic interventions. Integrated efforts are needed to raise community awareness, strengthen education and develop the village's economic potential. By combining human resource development and utilization of existing natural resources, the village has the opportunity to transform challenges into positive growth opportunities.

Optimizing tourism potential can be a catalyst for economic change, creating new jobs and increasing community income. Meanwhile, intensive and sustained educational programs on the ideal age of marriage and the impact of early marriage can help change people's mindsets. With the right approach, Aluh-aluh Besar Village can become a model for other villages in addressing the issue of early marriage while still advancing its local economy.

2. METHODS

This study employs a case study method with a qualitative approach to explore the enhancement of marriage age awareness through sexual education in Aluh-aluh Besar Village. The research is conducted in Aluh-aluh Besar Village, Banjar Regency, South Kalimantan. The population includes adolescents aged 12-18 years, parents, and educators in the village. The sample is selected using purposive sampling technique, consisting of 15 adolescents, 10 parents, and 5 educators.

The research instruments used are in-depth interviews and participatory observations. In-depth interviews are conducted with adolescents, parents, and educators to gain deep insights into their views on sexual education and marriage age awareness. Participatory observation is carried out during sexual education activities to directly observe the interactions and responses of the participants.

Data are collected through semi-structured interviews and observations. The results of the interviews and observations are analyzed using thematic qualitative analysis to identify the main themes emerging from the data.

Research ethics are maintained by ensuring informed consent from the research participants and keeping the collected data confidential, which is used solely for research purposes.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3. 1 Analysis of Community Perceptions of Early Marriage in Aluh-aluh Besar Village

Statement	Agree	Strongly Agree	Educators' Opinions
Early marriage is a tradition from ancestors.	10 people	5 people	-
Early marriage can save from emotional instability.	15 people	-	5 educators strongly agree
Early marriage can protect from free association dangers.	-	15 people	5 educators agree
Multicultural factors and employment make early marriage more acceptable.	-	15 people	-

The study explores various perspectives within Aluh-aluh Besar Village regarding early marriage, providing a nuanced view of how this practice is perceived in the community.

3.1.1. Tradition from Ancestors

The majority of the community members, with 10 people agreeing and 5 strongly agreeing, view early marriage as a traditional practice inherited from their ancestors. This indicates a strong cultural influence on perceptions of early marriage. Changing these views may require a sensitive approach that respects cultural traditions while introducing new perspectives.

3.1.2. Early Marriage and Emotional Stability

Fifteen community members believe that early marriage can save individuals from emotional instability, with 5 educators strongly agreeing. This suggests that early marriage is perceived as a way to achieve emotional stability, possibly due to the perceived security and support it provides during adolescence.

3.1.3. Protection from Free Association Dangers

Fifteen people strongly agree that early marriage can protect individuals from the dangers of free association, with an additional 5 educators agreeing. This reflects a concern for the risks associated with unsupervised interactions and a belief that early marriage offers a protective barrier against such dangers.

3.1.4. Multicultural and Employment Factors

All 15 respondents strongly agree that multicultural factors and stable employment make early marriage more acceptable. This implies that cultural diversity and job stability are significant factors influencing the acceptance of early marriage within the community.

3.1.5. Reasons for Early Marriage

The reasons provided for accepting early marriage include: (1) Completing school and then getting married to someone who already has a job; (2) Following the cultural practices of the family; (3) Minimal consideration of economic factors, with reliance on environmental factors.

A significant portion of the community views early marriage as a tradition passed down through generations. This belief is held by 10 individuals who agree with this notion and 5 who strongly agree. This indicates that cultural heritage and ancestral customs have a profound influence on attitudes towards early marriage. The strong cultural adherence

underscores the need for any interventions to be sensitive to these traditions, ensuring that changes in perspective respect and integrate local values.

The belief that early marriage can offer emotional stability is prevalent among the community members, with 15 agreeing and 5 educators strongly agreeing. This perspective suggests that marriage is seen as a means to provide emotional and social stability, particularly during adolescence when individuals are navigating complex emotional landscapes. This view highlights the perception that marriage offers a stable environment, which is deemed beneficial for young people facing emotional challenges.

There is also a notable perception that early marriage serves as a protective measure against the dangers associated with free association. Fifteen people strongly agree with this view, and 5 educators agree. This sentiment reflects a concern about the risks of unsupervised social interactions and underscores the belief that early marriage can act as a safeguard against behaviors considered risky or morally problematic. This protective aspect of early marriage is seen as a response to societal concerns about maintaining moral and social order.

Multicultural factors and employment stability play a significant role in the acceptance of early marriage within the community. Fifteen individuals strongly agree that these factors contribute to the acceptance of early marriage. This suggests that in a culturally diverse setting, the presence of stable employment is viewed as a critical factor supporting early marriage decisions. Employment is perceived as providing the economic security necessary to justify early marriage, highlighting the importance of economic stability in shaping attitudes towards marriage.

The reasons given for supporting early marriage include the completion of education followed by marriage to someone who is already employed, adherence to family cultural practices, and a reliance on environmental factors rather than economic considerations. These reasons illustrate a blend of traditional practices, perceived economic stability, and cultural expectations driving early marriage decisions. The emphasis on employment and the influence of previous generations indicate that decisions about marriage are influenced by a combination of tradition, economic security, and social norms.

Overall, the study reveals that early marriage in Aluh-aluh Besar Village is deeply intertwined with cultural traditions, perceived emotional benefits, protective intentions, and economic factors. Changing these perceptions will require a thoughtful approach that balances respect for cultural values with the introduction of new information about the benefits of delaying marriage. Comprehensive sexuality education, presented through a multicultural lens, could be a valuable strategy for providing broader insights and supporting informed decision-making about marriage age.

3.2 Influence of Cultural Traditions, Emotional Stability, and Employment on Early Marriage

The analysis reveals that early marriage is deeply rooted in the cultural and traditional values of Aluh-aluh Besar Village. A significant portion of the community perceives early marriage as a time-honored tradition inherited from their ancestors. This strong cultural attachment to tradition indicates that changing perceptions about early marriage will require a culturally sensitive approach. Any efforts to address early marriage must acknowledge and respect these cultural norms, integrating them into strategies for promoting alternative views on marriage timing.

The belief that early marriage provides emotional stability is also prevalent. Many community members and educators see marriage as a stabilizing force, especially during adolescence, which is often a period of emotional flux. This view underscores the perceived benefits of early marriage in offering emotional and social security. It highlights the importance of addressing the emotional needs of young people and considering how marriage is perceived as a means to achieve stability in their lives.

The perception that early marriage can protect individuals from the dangers of free association further reflects a concern about the potential risks associated with unsupervised social interactions. This protective aspect suggests that early marriage is seen as a way to safeguard young people from behaviors that are viewed as morally or socially undesirable. This view indicates a strong desire within the community to maintain social order and protect individuals from perceived risks associated with free social interactions.

The role of multiculturalism and stable employment in the acceptance of early marriage is also significant. The community views stable employment as an important factor that supports early marriage decisions. This suggests that economic stability is crucial in justifying early marriage and reflects how employment factors into decisions about marriage timing. The acceptance of early marriage in culturally diverse settings underscores the interplay between economic factors and cultural practices in shaping attitudes towards marriage.

Reasons for supporting early marriage, such as completing education and marrying someone with a stable job, following family cultural practices, and relying on environmental factors rather than economic considerations, illustrate a complex interplay of tradition, perceived economic security, and cultural expectations. These reasons highlight that decisions about early marriage are influenced by a combination of factors, including traditional beliefs, economic stability, and societal norms.

The findings from the study suggest that early marriage in Aluh-aluh Besar Village is influenced by a combination of cultural traditions, perceived emotional benefits, protective intentions, and economic factors. Addressing these issues requires a nuanced approach that respects cultural values while introducing new perspectives on the benefits of delaying marriage. Comprehensive sexuality education with a multicultural perspective could be an effective strategy for providing broader information and supporting informed decision-making about marriage age. This approach should aim to bridge the gap between traditional practices and contemporary understandings, promoting a more informed and balanced view on the timing of marriage.

3.3 The Effectiveness of Sexual Education in Raising Awareness of Marriage Age

The effectiveness of sexual education in raising awareness of marriage age is supported by several studies. Saudah et al. (2023) demonstrates that Communication, Information, and Education (CIE) strategies, particularly through an Interprofessional Education (IPE) approach, significantly improved self-awareness among adolescents, which can help them make informed decisions to avoid early marriage . Similarly, Gholizadeh et al. (2017) indicates that the use of mobile applications in conjunction with counseling can significantly improve sexual awareness, although it does not affect sexual satisfaction in the short term. Yousefzadeh et al. (2017) further supports the notion that sex education, especially when aligned with religious teachings, can enhance sexual performance and satisfaction, which may indirectly influence marriage age by fostering a more informed and mature approach to sexual relationships. However, there are

complexities to consider. Agha (2009) suggests that socioeconomic factors and exposure to mass media may have a more immediate impact on the timing of sexual initiation than sex education programs, particularly among Christian adolescents in Nigeria.

Additionally, Hannah & Stagg (2016) highlights the need for tailored sex education approaches for specific populations, such as individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), to ensure effectiveness. In summary, while sexual education programs have been shown to be effective in raising awareness about the appropriate age for marriage and sexual initiation, their success may be influenced by cultural, religious, and socioeconomic factors. Tailored approaches that consider these variables are crucial for the effectiveness of such programs. The evidence suggests that when implemented thoughtfully, sexual education can be a valuable tool in delaying early marriage and promoting informed decision-making among adolescents

Evaluating the application of a multicultural approach in sexual education involves examining how well this approach integrates diverse cultural perspectives and addresses the needs of a varied student population. The effectiveness of a multicultural approach is measured by its ability to incorporate diverse cultural values and norms related to sexuality and relationships. This includes ensuring that the curriculum represents the experiences and challenges of different cultural and ethnic groups and respects the cultural backgrounds of all students. A key aspect of the evaluation is how well the curriculum adapts to the local cultural context while maintaining its educational effectiveness. This means addressing specific cultural issues and challenges faced by students in their communities and ensuring that the content is relevant and relatable. Engagement is crucial, as the multicultural approach should captivate students from diverse backgrounds, making the information both accessible and applicable.

Feedback from students is essential in understanding how well the multicultural aspects of the education are integrated. It provides insight into whether students feel their cultural perspectives are acknowledged and respected. Additionally, the evaluation looks at whether the multicultural approach leads to meaningful changes in students' attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors concerning sexual health and relationships.

Challenges and barriers also need to be identified, including any resistance from students, parents, or educators to the multicultural approach and the reasons behind it. Resource limitations, such as inadequate training or materials for educators, can also affect the implementation of the multicultural curriculum. Recommendations for improving the approach might include providing enhanced training for educators to increase their multicultural competence and ensuring that the curriculum is continuously updated based on feedback and evolving cultural contexts. This helps to ensure that the sexual education program remains effective and relevant for all students. Through such a comprehensive evaluation, insights can be gained into the strengths and weaknesses of the multicultural approach, guiding future enhancements to better serve diverse student populations.

The evaluation of the implementation of a multicultural approach in sexuality education reveals a complex interplay of cultural sensitivity and inclusivity. Research indicates that comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) can be effectively integrated with a multicultural approach, as seen in the development of character education modules with a multicultural perspective in Civic Education (Al Atok et al., 2015). This approach takes into account the diverse cultural backgrounds of students and the need for competence in handling multicultural nuances in educational content. However, there are challenges in advocating for CSE within varied socio-cultural contexts. For instance, in Nigeria,

conservative values and religious beliefs pose barriers to the implementation of CSE, necessitating strategies that are sensitive to the cultural context (Miller, 2023). Teachers experience conflicts in teaching CSE due to cultural and religious backgrounds, with traditional sex education not yet fully transformed to CSE in predominantly Christian countries (Shibuya et al., 2023). Moreover, the inclusion of sexual pleasure in CSE is advocated to address the full spectrum of sexual well-being, which may require a nuanced approach within different cultural settings (Mark et al., 2021). While the integration of a multicultural approach in sexuality education is recognized as important for addressing the diverse needs of students, it faces significant challenges due to cultural and religious barriers. Effective implementation requires culturally relevant and inclusive curricula, as well as advocacy and training that respect the socio-cultural context of the learners. The development of character education with a multicultural approach (Al Atok et al., 2015) and the need for culturally sensitive advocacy strategies (Miller, 2023) highlight the importance of evaluating and adapting CSE to fit multicultural environments.

4. CONCLUSION

The research conducted in Aluh-aluh Besar Village examines the community's attitudes toward early marriage and the role of comprehensive sexuality education in shaping these perspectives. The study reveals a strong cultural foundation influencing early marriage views, with many residents viewing it as a longstanding tradition passed down through generations. This cultural adherence suggests that interventions must be sensitive to local traditions while promoting alternative views on marriage timing. Early marriage is often perceived as providing emotional stability and social security, highlighting the need for educational programs to address emotional needs and offer alternative solutions for stability.

Additionally, early marriage is seen as a protective measure against the perceived dangers of free association, emphasizing the community's concern about maintaining social order. Factors such as stable employment and multiculturalism also influence early marriage decisions by providing economic security and fitting within the community's culturally diverse context. The research underscores the importance of integrating diverse cultural perspectives into sexual education to engage students from various backgrounds and respect their cultural values.

In conclusion, addressing early marriage in Aluh-aluh Besar Village requires a nuanced approach that respects cultural values while introducing new perspectives on marriage timing. Comprehensive sexuality education with a multicultural lens can support informed decision-making and promote healthier choices regarding marriage age. This research significantly contributes to multicultural studies by demonstrating how culturally sensitive interventions can align with local traditions while fostering a contemporary understanding of marriage. Policymakers and educators should develop culturally inclusive programs and legal reforms that support these educational initiatives, recognizing the complexity of cultural contexts and encouraging community engagement.

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