



## Reducing Divorce in Early Marriages: A Persuasive Communication Approach by Islamic Religious Counselors

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**Abstract.** This study investigates the role of Islamic Religious Counselors in mitigating divorce among early-marriage couples through persuasive communication. Although early marriage is frequently associated with an elevated risk of marital instability, limited research has explored how religious counseling contributes to divorce prevention. Employing a descriptive qualitative design, this study gathered data through observation and in-depth interviews with religious counselors and institutional leaders involved in marital guidance. Data were analyzed using Carl I. Hovland's Persuasive Communication Theory. The findings indicate that Islamic Religious Counselors serve a critical function in preventing marital dissolution by deploying persuasive, dialogical, and non-judgmental communication. Key strategies include bidirectional communication, accessible language, storytelling, and family involvement. These approaches foster greater openness, emotional stability, and constructive conflict resolution among couples. Ultimately, this study underscores the potential of faith-based counseling as an effective communication strategy for strengthening marital resilience and reducing the risk of divorce in early marriages.

**Keywords:** Islamic religious counseling; persuasive communication; early marriage; divorce prevention; marriage counseling.

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## **Introduction**

Marriage at an underage age remains a social and legal issue that still occurs in many countries, including Indonesia. This practice is generally defined as a marriage involving one or both partners under the age of 18, an age that is internationally considered immature for entering the institution of marriage. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), child marriage is a form of violation of children's rights because it hinders their education, health, and psychological development (UNICEF, 2021). In Indonesia, although Law Number 16 of 2019 has raised the minimum marriage age to 19 years for both men and women, marriage dispensations are still frequently granted by religious courts for certain reasons, such as premarital pregnancy or parental pressure. As a result, early marriage continues to occur in society, especially in areas with low levels of education and economic conditions (Akbar & Ridwan, 2026).

The impacts of early marriage are complex and tend to be negative, both socially, psychologically, and in terms of health. Girls who marry at an early age are at a higher risk of experiencing domestic violence, high-risk pregnancies, and increased maternal and infant mortality rates (Suhaili, 2021). In addition, early marriage often leads to interrupted education, which eventually limits access to decent employment and increases the likelihood of being trapped in structural poverty. From a psychological perspective, couples who marry at a young age generally do not yet possess sufficient emotional and mental readiness to face the dynamics of married life, making them more vulnerable to conflict and relationship breakdown (Akbar et al., 2025). To establish a harmonious and sustainable family, thorough preparation is required biologically, psychologically, and pedagogically. The readiness of men as heads of the family and breadwinners, as well as the readiness of women as mothers who manage the household, give birth, educate, and care for children, are important factors in maintaining family stability. Without such readiness, marriage has the potential to encounter various serious problems throughout married life.

Beyond legal regulations, the issue of early marriage in Indonesia cannot be separated from religious and cultural considerations, particularly within Muslim communities where marriage practices are often influenced by both state law and Islamic teachings. While national legislation emphasizes age requirements as a measure of legal and social readiness, Islamic perspectives similarly stress the importance of maturity and responsibility before entering marriage. Therefore, understanding early marriage requires an integrated approach that considers both legal frameworks and religious values as complementary mechanisms for promoting family stability and preventing marital breakdown.

Early-age marriage is often correlated with high divorce rates. Marriage is a physical and spiritual bond between a husband and a wife; therefore, marriage is not merely a physical relationship but also an emotional and spiritual union (Mz et al., 2025). This is caused by the emotional unpreparedness of married couples in dealing with conflicts, economic pressures, and household responsibilities. The heavy burden of living expenses and the inability to manage emotions maturely often become the main triggers of disputes that end in divorce. Therefore, marriages entered into without psychological maturity tend to be difficult to maintain in the long term (Ariesa et al., 2024). From an Islamic perspective, although there is no explicit verse in the Qur'an that specifically mentions the minimum age for marriage,

the principles of intellectual and physical maturity are considered essential requirements before a person is entrusted with major responsibilities such as marriage. This is reflected in Surah An-Nisa verse 6, which states:

وَإِنبَلُوا الْيَتَامَىٰ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا بَلَغُوا النِّكَاحَ فَإِنْ آنَسْتُمْ مِنْهُمْ رُشْدًا فَادْفَعُوا إِلَيْهِمْ أَمْوَالَهُمْ ۖ وَلَا تَأْكُلُوهَا إِسْرَافًا وَبِدَارًا أَن يَكْبَرُوا ۗ وَمَنْ كَانَ غَنِيًّا فَلْيَسْتَعْفِفْ ۖ وَمَنْ كَانَ فَقِيرًا فَلْيَأْكُلْ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ ۗ فَإِذَا دَفَعْتُمْ إِلَيْهِمْ أَمْوَالَهُمْ فَأَشْهِدُوا عَلَيْهِمْ ۗ وَكَفَىٰ بِاللَّهِ حَسِيبًا

*“Test the orphans until they reach the age of marriage. Then, if in your judgment they are capable (of managing their property), hand over their property to them. Do not consume it excessively and hastily before they become mature. Whoever (among the guardians) is self-sufficient should refrain (from taking the property), and whoever is poor may take from it in a proper manner. Then, when you hand over their property to them, bring witnesses before them. And sufficient is Allah as a Reckoner.”* (QS. An-Nisa: 6). (quran.kemenag.go.id, 2019)

This verse can serve as a normative basis that underage marriage should be avoided if the prospective couple has not yet achieved intellectual, physical, and mental maturity. The reality in society shows that the practice of early marriage remains relatively high in several regions of Indonesia. According to data from the Central Statistics Agency of North Sumatra Province, the phenomenon of child marriage still occurs in North Sumatra. The percentage of women aged 20–24 who were married before the age of 18 was recorded at 10.82% in 2019, 10.35% in 2020, and 9.23% in 2021, indicating a declining trend but still showing the persistence of early marriage practices in the province. This data illustrates that some young women in North Sumatra entered marriage before the age of 18, which may affect aspects of education, reproductive health, and socio-economic readiness. In addition, the latest publication from the Central Statistics Agency of Deli Serdang Regency through the 2023–2024 Gender and Child Profile Report also shows that issues related to child protection and adolescent social conditions remain concerns in the region, although detailed figures on early marriage require reference to the complete statistical document (deliserdangkab.bps.go.id, 2024).

In the context of preventing the negative impacts of early marriage, the role of Islamic Religious Counselors becomes highly strategic. Various previous studies have emphasized the importance of the role of Islamic Religious Counselors in preventing the negative impacts of early marriage. According to (Hermambang et al., 2021) in their study entitled “Factors Influencing Early Marriage in Indonesia,” religious counselors have the primary task of directing and enhancing religious guidance and counseling activities through the use of religious language that is easily understood by society. Religious counselors function as providers of information and education, consultants, and advocates who assist communities in resolving personal and family issues, including problems related to marriage and divorce. (Pangestu, 2021), in the study entitled “The Role of Islamic Religious Counselors in Preventing Early Marriage in Doro District, Pekalongan Regency (Case Study of the Office of Religious Affairs (*Kantor Urusan Agama, KUA*) of Doro District, Pekalongan Regency),” stated that the factors causing early marriage include economic, social, and psychological factors. In dealing with these issues, Islamic Religious Counselors act as role models, community leaders, and imams who provide moral and spiritual guidance. This role is highly relevant in efforts to reduce divorce rates caused by early marriage, particularly through

premarital guidance, mentoring for young families, and education regarding marriage readiness. Furthermore, (Prमितasari & Megatsari, 2022), in their study entitled “Early Marriage and Various Factors Affecting It,” showed that Islamic Religious Counselors carry out various educational and socialization efforts regarding marriage law, family responsibilities, and the negative impacts of early marriage as part of reducing early marriage cases. These findings illustrate that the role of religious counselors is not only ritualistic but also educational and communicative in the context of preventing early marriage.

This study employs the Persuasive Communication Theory proposed by Carl I. Hovland (1953) as the analytical foundation to examine the effectiveness of the role of Islamic Religious Counselors in influencing the attitudes and behaviors of society, particularly young couples, regarding early marriage. Persuasive communication is understood as a process of delivering messages aimed at influencing the attitudes, opinions, and behaviors of communicants without coercion, but rather through rational, emotional, and moral approaches. In the context of this research, Islamic Religious Counselors act as communicators who deliver religious messages concerning marriage readiness, the responsibilities of husband and wife, and the negative impacts of divorce on children and family resilience. These messages are conveyed through various communication channels, such as premarital guidance, religious counseling, and family mentoring within the KUA environment. Through effective persuasive communication, it is expected that changes in the attitudes and behaviors of young couples will occur, thereby reducing divorce rates in early marriages at the KUA of Percut Sei Tuan, Deli Serdang Regency.

Based on the results of preliminary observations and interviews conducted by the researcher at the KUA of Percut Sei Tuan, Deli Serdang Regency, from September 23–29, 2025, over approximately one week, the researcher found that there were still quite a large number of early marriage cases ending in divorce within a relatively short period. Observations and interviews were conducted with Mr. BK, an Islamic Religious Counselor responsible for premarital guidance and family development. The phenomenon of divorce generally occurred among couples who married at a young age, some of whom were still high school graduates or had only recently graduated from high school. Early marriage was often triggered by factors such as promiscuity, premarital pregnancy, and family pressure to marry quickly in order to preserve the family’s reputation. However, marriages conducted without sufficient mental, emotional, and practical understanding of household life often led to various conflicts, such as prolonged arguments, unhealthy communication, and the inability to resolve problems maturely, which eventually resulted in divorce.

Considering the increasingly widespread impacts, the role of Islamic Religious Counselors at the KUA of Percut Sei Tuan becomes highly strategic in efforts to reduce divorce cases caused by early marriage. Islamic Religious Counselors do not only function as deliverers of religious materials, but also as mentors, motivators, and family counselors. Through premarital guidance activities, counseling on marriage readiness, Sakinah family development, and mentoring for young couples vulnerable to conflict, Islamic Religious Counselors are expected to reduce divorce rates and minimize their negative impacts on children and families. Therefore, this research is important to conduct in order to examine in depth the role of Islamic Religious Counselors in reducing divorce cases in early marriages

at the KUA of Percut Sei Tuan, Deli Serdang Regency, while also evaluating their contribution to maintaining family resilience and protecting the future of children.

Previous studies have examined the causes of early marriage and the role of Islamic Religious Counselors in prevention efforts (Hermambang et al., 2021; Pangestu, 2022; Pramitasari & Megatsari, 2022). However, these studies primarily describe the factors contributing to early marriage and the general functions of counselors, while paying limited attention to the communication processes through which counseling influences marital stability and divorce prevention. Consequently, the effectiveness of persuasive communication in supporting young couples remains underexplored. To address this gap, this study applies Carl I. Hovland’s Persuasive Communication Theory to analyze how Islamic Religious Counselors use persuasive communication strategies to guide early-married couples and reduce the risk of divorce. This approach contributes a deeper understanding of faith-based counseling as a mechanism for strengthening marital resilience among young couples.

## Method

### Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design. This approach was chosen to understand in depth the role of Islamic Religious Counselors in reducing divorce cases in early marriages at the Office of Religious Affairs (*Kantor Urusan Agama, KUA*) of Percut Sei Tuan, Deli Serdang Regency, North Sumatra.

### Participants

The participants in this study consisted of Islamic Religious Counselors involved in counseling and marriage guidance activities at the KUA of Percut Sei Tuan. The participants are as follows:

**Table 1.** Research Informant

No	Informant Category	Number of Informants	Description
1	Head of KUA	1	Provides information on policies, marriage guidance programs, and divorce trends.
2	Islamic Religious Counselors	3-4	Explains counseling practices, persuasive communication strategies, and mentoring activities for young couples
3	Early-Married Couples (still married)	4-6	Shares experiences of receiving counseling services and the perceived influence on marital relationships.
4	Early-Married Couples with Marital Conflict History	2-4	Provides insights into how counseling helped address conflicts and prevent divorce.
5	Divorced Early-Married Couples (if accessible)	2-3	Explains factors contributing to divorce and evaluates the limitations of counseling interventions
6	Family Members/Parents	2-4	Describes family involvement in marriage decisions and counseling processes.

### **Participant Recruitment Procedure**

Participants were recruited using purposive sampling to ensure that only individuals with direct experience and relevant knowledge of early marriage counseling and divorce prevention were included in the study. The recruitment process began by obtaining permission from the KUA administration. The Head of KUA assisted in identifying potential participants who met the inclusion criteria, including Islamic Religious Counselors actively involved in premarital guidance and family counseling, as well as young married couples who had participated in counseling programs. Potential participants were contacted individually, informed about the purpose of the study, and invited to participate voluntarily. Prior to the interviews, all participants received information regarding the study objectives, confidentiality procedures, and their right to withdraw from the research at any stage. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection commenced.

### **Research Instruments**

The data sources in this study consisted of primary and secondary data (Nurrisa & Hermina, 2025). Primary data were obtained through observation and in-depth interviews with Islamic Religious Counselors at KUA Percut Sei Tuan. Observation was conducted to directly observe the process of religious counseling, premarital guidance, and the forms of communication used by Islamic Religious Counselors in providing guidance to the community. In-depth interviews were conducted to explore experiences, perspectives, and persuasive communication strategies applied by the counselors in reducing divorce cases caused by early marriage. Secondary data were obtained through literature review, including books, scientific journals, previous studies, marriage regulations, and official documents from KUA and related institutions relevant to persuasive communication, Islamic religious counseling, early marriage, and divorce (Mubarok & Nurmalia, 2025).

### **Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Interview data were transcribed and reviewed repeatedly, while observation notes were organized according to the research objectives. A semi-structured interview guide was used to explore participants' experiences of premarital counseling, family mentoring, and divorce prevention efforts. Data analysis was conducted through thematic coding. Relevant statements were identified, grouped into categories, and developed into themes related to persuasive communication strategies and the role of Islamic Religious Counselors. The findings were then interpreted using Carl I. Hovland's Persuasive Communication Theory. To ensure trustworthiness, data triangulation was applied by comparing information from interviews, observations, and documents. Member checking and peer debriefing were also conducted to verify interpretations and enhance the credibility of the findings (Nurrisa & Hermina, 2025).

## Results

### The Role of Islamic Religious Counselors at the KUA of Percut Sei Tuan, Deli Serdang Regency in Reducing Divorce Cases in Early Marriages

The findings indicate that Islamic Religious Counselors may contribute to encouraging more mature decision-making among early-marriage couples and may support efforts to maintain household harmony.

Religious counselors play a strategic role in reducing divorce among young married couples. Through marriage counseling services, they provide guidance, advice, and continuous support to couples who are at greater risk of experiencing marital conflict. Beyond serving as mediators in resolving domestic disputes, religious counselors also educate couples about the rights and responsibilities of spouses, the potential consequences of divorce, and the importance of preserving family stability. This role is reflected in the statement of BK, a senior Islamic religious counselor at the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) in Percut Sei Tuan:

*“Islamic Religious Counselors play a role by listening to the complaints of couples, especially young couples who intend to divorce. The counselors invite the husband and wife to discuss together the problems they face, such as economic issues, emotions, and communication. In the process, the counselors act as mediators who calm the situation and help the couples understand each other. Furthermore, the counselors provide guidance and advice, while encouraging couples not to rush into making decisions and to give time to improve the situation.”*

In line with the interview results, ZN, an Islamic Religious Counselor, explained that:

*“Nowadays, marriage, especially among young people, is often considered a trend or merely following others, without truly thinking about mental readiness and the responsibilities involved. This condition makes religious counselors feel the need to take a direct role, not only when problems have already arisen, but even before the marriage takes place. In practice, counselors often engage in casual discussions with prospective couples, discussing simple matters such as economic readiness, ways to resolve conflicts, and future household life. In some cases, after receiving explanations and considerations from the counselors, some prospective couples chose to postpone or even cancel their marriage because they felt unprepared.”*

The interview results with DR, a female Islamic Religious Counselor at Percut Sei Tuan, explained that:

*“The role of the counselor emphasizes emotional assistance and household communication, especially for wives. Counselors become a place for women to share their problems related to economic difficulties, lack of attention from husbands, or family interference. In this case, counselors act as companions, guides, and advisors by providing simple guidance related to communication, role sharing, and financial management. In several cases, after undergoing several mentoring sessions, couples who initially intended to divorce decided to stay together and improve their communication because they had begun to understand each other.”*

Based on the overall interview results with the Islamic Religious Counselors, namely BK, ZN, and DR, it can be concluded that the role of Islamic Religious Counselors at the KUA of Percut Sei Tuan is very important and complementary in efforts to reduce divorce cases, especially in early marriages. Religious counselors act as mediators who resolve couples' conflicts, guides and advisors who provide understanding about responsibilities and

readiness for married life, as well as emotional companions who assist couples, especially women, in dealing with household pressures. The approach used is persuasive, dialogic, and non-coercive, both before and after marriage takes place. In some cases, the role of counselors has encouraged couples to postpone marriage or reconsider divorce in order to think more carefully about readiness and the future of the family. This shows that the existence of religious counselors functions not only as providers of religious advice, but also as determinants in directing more mature decision-making to maintain the integrity and sustainability of the household.

The role of Islamic Religious Counselors at the KUA of Percut Sei Tuan, Deli Serdang Regency in reducing divorce cases in early marriages appears to be highly strategic and multifunctional. Counselors not only act as mediators who resolve couples' conflicts, but also as guides, advisors, and emotional companions who assist couples, especially women, in dealing with household pressures. Through persuasive, relaxed, and non-judgmental communication, counselors are able to reduce couples' emotions, open healthy dialogue, and foster awareness regarding the responsibilities of husbands and wives. Religious and moral messages delivered simply and relevantly to daily life make couples more open, think more clearly, and reconsider decisions to divorce. This approach also encourages couples to postpone or cancel divorce intentions for the sake of a more stable family future. Thus, the role of religious counselors is not only as providers of advice, but also as guardians of family unity, as well as an important factor in reducing divorce rates in early marriages in the region.

### **Persuasive Communication Strategies Used by Islamic Religious Counselors in Providing Guidance and Assistance to Early Marriage Couples to Prevent Divorce**

The persuasive communication strategies used by Islamic Religious Counselors are focused on efforts to guide and assist early marriage couples in order to prevent divorce. This strategy emphasizes a relaxed, dialogic, and non-judgmental approach, so that couples feel comfortable expressing their complaints and household problems. Counselors use a combination of religious advice, moral values, and examples of real practices in everyday life. Persuasive communication is also directed at fostering couples' awareness of responsibilities, the importance of communication, and emotional management in household life. Through this strategy, early marriage couples learn to think more maturely before deciding to divorce. This approach does not only focus on the couples, but also involves families as supporters. Through this method, persuasive communication becomes an effective tool in maintaining household harmony and reducing divorce rates in early marriages.

As explained in the interview with BK, a senior Islamic Religious Counselor at Percut Sei Tuan:

*“Islamic Religious Counselors use persuasive communication through a relaxed and warm approach so that early marriage couples feel comfortable and open. Counselors first listen to complaints without judging, then provide simple advice about mutual respect, financial management, and the division of responsibilities in household life. In addition, counselors deliver exemplary stories from the Prophet Muhammad and his companions and invite couples to discuss and seek solutions together before deciding to divorce. This approach also involves the family as a form of support. Through this method, couples*

*become calmer, are able to think clearly, and many choose to improve communication and maintain their household.”*

In line with the interview results, ZN, an Islamic Religious Counselor, explained that:

*“Counselors emphasize honesty, sincerity, and concern for the needs of their clients/congregation. Messages are delivered through question-and-answer sessions and discussions so that the congregation feels involved. Communication techniques are adjusted to the emotional condition of the congregation and strengthened with real examples and relevant inspirational stories. The use of local language is also applied to strengthen closeness. This approach is accompanied by motivation so that the congregation is encouraged to make changes voluntarily, making the messages easier to accept and apply.”*

Based on the interview results with BK and ZN, it can be concluded that persuasive communication strategies are the main key in guiding and assisting early marriage couples. Religious counselors prioritize warm, honest, and empathetic approaches so that couples feel comfortable, appreciated, and willing to openly express their problems. Communication is carried out interactively through listening, questioning, and discussion techniques, and strengthened with real examples, inspirational stories, and Islamic values that are easy to understand. Language adjustment, including the use of local languages, as well as attention to the emotional condition of couples, also make the messages easier to accept without causing rejection. Through this strategy, couples are encouraged to think more calmly, consider decisions carefully, and become motivated to make changes voluntarily. Overall, personal and humane persuasive communication has proven effective in preventing divorce and maintaining the harmony of early marriage households.

The interview results with DR, a female Islamic Religious Counselor at Percut Sei Tuan, explained that:

*“A humanistic and sincere approach is considered capable of increasing the effectiveness of persuasive communication and strengthening relationships between counselors and the congregation. Counselors adjust their communication methods according to the character and condition of their clients so that messages do not seem rigid. Personal experiences, motivation, and advice are delivered casually so that the atmosphere becomes closer and clients feel comfortable asking questions and discussing. This approach shows that counselors are not only providers of material, but also companions who care about their clients.”*

In line with the interview results, RP, who is involved in counseling and divorce prevention education activities, explained that:

*“The success of message delivery is determined not only by the material, but also by the counselor’s sensitivity to the client’s needs. RP uses personal and innovative approaches, such as stories or relevant experiences, so that messages are easier to accept. Building trust and client comfort is the main key so that the atmosphere of guidance and counseling feels warm, not monotonous, and religious messages can be understood and internalized by clients.”*

Based on the interview results with DR and RP, it can be concluded that effective persuasive communication strategies strongly depend on humanistic, sincere, and personal approaches. Counselors not only deliver religious materials, but also build emotional closeness with clients/congregations through sharing personal experiences, using relevant stories, and delivering messages in a relaxed and non-rigid manner. Adjusting communication

methods to the character, condition, and needs of clients/congregations becomes an important factor so that messages can be well received without creating distance. Sensitivity to client dynamics, accompanied by efforts to build trust and comfort, makes counselors viewed as caring friends rather than merely advisors. Through this strategy, the guidance atmosphere becomes warmer, closer, and more meaningful, so that religious messages are not only heard but also felt and internalized by the congregation.

Persuasive communication strategies play a very important role in guiding and assisting early marriage couples in preventing divorce. The approach used is not patronizing or judgmental, but rather emphasizes warm, relaxed, and empathetic communication. Through this method, couples feel appreciated, listened to, and safe in expressing the household problems they face, enabling counselors to provide guidance according to the couples needs and conditions. In addition, the persuasive communication carried out by religious counselors has also proven capable of fostering awareness, motivation, and willingness among couples to improve their relationships voluntarily.

Based on the interview results with BK, ZN, DR, and RP, the following persuasive communication strategies were identified:

**Table 2.** Summary of Persuasive Communication Strategies of Islamic Religious Counselors

No	Strategy Indicators	Forms of Implementation	Impact on Couples
1	Humanistic and Empathetic Approach	Listening without judging, creating a relaxed and warm atmosphere	Couples feel comfortable and open in expressing problems
2	Two-Way Communication	Question and answer sessions, discussions, interactive dialogue	Couples feel involved in finding solutions
3	Strengthening Religious Values	Simple advice, exemplary stories of the Prophet Muhammad, inspirational stories	Increases moral awareness and household responsibilities
4	Adjustment of Language and Emotions	Using local language, adjusting to the emotional condition of clients	Messages are more easily accepted without rejection
5	Motivation and Role Modeling	Sharing personal experiences, relevant stories, encouragement for voluntary change	Couples are encouraged to improve communication and maintain the household
6	Family Involvement	Involving families as a support system	Social support increases and conflicts can be minimized

Source: Researcher's Data Processing, 2025.

Based on the table above, it can be concluded that the persuasive communication strategies implemented by Islamic Religious Counselors are based on personal, empathetic, and participatory approaches. Counselors not only act as providers of religious materials, but also as companions who build emotional closeness with couples. The adjustment of communication to the character, psychological condition, and needs of the couples becomes the main factor in the success of this strategy. Overall, persuasive communication that is humanistic, dialogic, and based on religious values has proven effective in helping early marriage couples think more maturely, manage conflicts wisely, and maintain household harmony, thereby reducing the potential for divorce.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Model of Persuasive Communication in Preventing Divorce among Early-Married Couples

## Discussion

This study employs Carl I. Hovland's Persuasive Communication Theory as an analytical framework to understand how Islamic Religious Counselors at KUA Percut Sei Tuan influence attitudes and behaviors among early-married couples. Hovland defines persuasive communication as a process through which a communicator intentionally delivers messages to influence the attitudes, beliefs, opinions, and behaviors of others. According to Hovland, the effectiveness of persuasive communication is determined by five main components: communicator, message, channel, receiver, and effect (Hovland et al., 1953). This perspective has been further developed by persuasion scholars who emphasize the importance of message processing and audience involvement in attitude change (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010)

The communicator refers to the source of the message whose credibility, expertise, and trustworthiness influence the acceptance of persuasive messages. The message consists of the content, arguments, and values conveyed to the audience. The channel refers to the medium or method used to transmit messages, while the receiver represents the target audience who interprets and responds to the message. Finally, the effect refers to the changes in attitudes, understanding, or behaviors resulting from the communication process.

In the context of this study, Islamic Religious Counselors function as communicators who deliver persuasive messages through counseling, mediation, and premarital guidance activities. The messages conveyed include religious teachings, marital responsibilities, conflict resolution strategies, and family values. These messages are communicated to early-married couples as receivers, with the expected effect of increasing awareness, improving

communication, strengthening commitment, and encouraging more mature decision-making regarding marital conflicts and divorce. Based on the interview findings, the relationship between Hovland's communication components and the counseling practices implemented at KUA Percut Sei Tuan can be illustrated through the following conceptual model.

The findings of this study indicate that the role of Islamic Religious Counselors at KUA Percut Sei Tuan, Deli Serdang Regency is very strategic in reducing divorce cases in early marriages. Counselors not only function as providers of religious teachings, but also act as mediators, guides, advisors, and emotional companions for young couples. This role allows counselors to be directly involved in the household dynamics of early marriage couples, especially when conflicts arise that may lead to divorce. The approach used is fair, neutral, and non-judgmental, so that couples feel heard and assisted in finding more mature solutions before deciding to divorce.

The findings of this study are in line with (Siagian & Misrah, 2024), which explain that religious guidance has an important role in the context of early marriage. Early marriage often faces various risks, such as lack of understanding regarding marital responsibilities, emotional instability, and the inability to manage household conflicts. Through religious guidance, couples gain understanding of religious values as well as practical skills in dealing with marital problems. Thus, the role of counselors at Percut Sei Tuan in providing counseling and assistance has proven capable of strengthening family foundations and reducing the risk of divorce. These findings are consistent with studies on emerging adulthood, which suggest that young couples often experience emotional instability, identity exploration, and limited readiness for marital responsibilities, thereby increasing vulnerability to marital conflict (Arnett, 2000; Larson & Holman, 1994).

The findings of this study also support the study of (Sampurna et al., 2025), which highlights the role of religious counselors as agents of change in preventing early marriage. The study explains that the effectiveness of counselors is influenced by their ability to adjust communication strategies according to the characteristics of the target audience. In the context of Islamic religious counseling at Percut Sei Tuan, counselors apply persuasive communication that is dialogic, simple, and empathetic, making religious messages easier for early marriage couples to accept. This approach helps couples understand the long-term impacts of divorce as well as the importance of commitment and responsibility in household life. International studies also indicate that religious leaders and faith-based counselors often serve as trusted agents of change because their moral authority and community legitimacy increase message acceptance and behavioral compliance (Mahoney, 2010; Koenig, 2012).

Furthermore, the role of Islamic Religious Counselors at Percut Sei Tuan is also in line with the institutional function of the KUA as stated by (Harahap et al., 2024), which explains that the KUA has an official mandate in fostering *sakinah* families and developing marital life in society. Guidance and counseling efforts carried out continuously are able to increase public awareness regarding marriage rules and values. With the support of counselors, the KUA not only functions as an institution for marriage administration, but also as a guidance institution that contributes to reducing early marriage and divorce rates. This finding is supported by previous studies showing that religious involvement contributes to stronger

marital commitment, family resilience, and positive coping mechanisms during family crises (Marks, 2005; Dollahite et al., 2004).

The persuasive communication strategies used by Islamic Religious Counselors in guiding and assisting early marriage couples are carried out through humanistic, relaxed, and empathetic approaches. Counselors position themselves not as judgmental parties, but as listeners who provide a safe space for couples to openly express household problems. The two-way communication pattern involving listening, questioning, and discussion has proven capable of creating a dialogic atmosphere and building couples' trust in counselors. According to Hovland et al. (1953), source credibility is one of the strongest determinants of persuasive effectiveness. Trustworthiness and expertise increase the likelihood that audiences will accept persuasive messages and translate them into behavioral change. Similar conclusions were reported by Worthington (2009) in faith-based counseling contexts. This strategy is in line with (Sikumbang et al., 2019), which emphasizes the importance of communicator credibility and the application of Islamic communication principles that are gentle, honest, and touching to the heart so that messages can be accepted without causing rejection.

In addition, religious messages are delivered using simple and easily understood language, accompanied by inspirational stories, personal experiences, and real examples from everyday life. This approach reflects both rational and experiential persuasion strategies. Research suggests that messages connected to personal experiences are more easily internalized and more likely to influence behavioral intentions (Bandura, 1986; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). This strategy strengthens the persuasive power of the message because couples not only receive advice normatively, but are also able to relate it to the realities they experience. This finding is consistent with (Wahyudi & Sobar, 2024), who explain that persuasive methods can encourage people to practice Islamic teachings consciously through emotional approaches, rational approaches using logical arguments and evidence from the Qur'an and Hadith, and experiential approaches emphasizing real experiences through social activities.

The persuasive communication strategy in this study is also directed at fostering awareness, responsibility, and maturity among couples in carrying out marriage. Counselors adjust their communication methods according to the emotional condition and character of the couples, including the use of local language to build emotional closeness. Motivation and encouragement are given subtly so that behavioral changes emerge from the couples' own awareness rather than pressure. This approach is relevant to the findings of (Yanti et al., 2023), which mention that early marriage couples generally do not yet possess mature psychological readiness and understanding of responsibilities, thus requiring empathetic and supportive assistance. Similar findings have been reported globally, where child marriage is associated with lower educational attainment, limited psychological readiness, and increased risks of marital dissatisfaction and divorce (Nour, 2009; Raj, 2010; Lee-Rife et al., 2012).

Other findings also show that counselors' communication strategies are not only carried out through personal approaches, but also through guidance programs such as religious lectures, question-and-answer sessions, religious skills training, and providing appreciation to participants so that they become more motivated to participate in guidance activities. This

finding is in line with (Rahman et al., 2024), which emphasize that the combination of educational programs and communicative approaches can increase participation and religious understanding among participants. In addition, (Julina, 2020) explains that the success of religious guidance is also influenced by good material planning so that the delivered messages are able to attract attention and are easily accepted by society. Evidence from premarital education and couple counseling programs also demonstrates that communication training can improve relationship quality, strengthen commitment, and reduce marital distress among young couples (Halford et al., 2008; Hawkins et al., 2008; Markman et al., 2010).

Overall, persuasive communication strategies with communicative, empathetic, and religious value-based approaches are able to encourage couples to think more maturely before deciding to divorce, increase awareness of roles and responsibilities within the household, and strengthen couples' commitment to maintaining marital harmony.

### **Novelty of the Research**

The novelty of this research lies in the analysis of persuasive communication strategies used by Islamic Religious Counselors in reducing divorce cases in early marriages at KUA Percut Sei Tuan, Deli Serdang Regency. This study specifically examines persuasive communication strategies used through humanistic, empathetic, dialogic, and religious value-based approaches in guiding and assisting early marriage couples. In addition, this study uses the perspective of Persuasive Communication Theory by Carl I. Hovland to analyze the effectiveness of communication strategies applied by counselors in preventing divorce.

### **Implications and Contributions**

The findings of this study show that persuasive communication strategies based on empathy, dialogue, and religious values are able to help early marriage couples think more maturely, manage conflicts, and maintain household harmony. The role of Islamic Religious Counselors also contributes to strengthening family resilience and reducing the potential for divorce in early marriages.

### **Research Limitations**

This study only focuses on Islamic Religious Counselors and individuals involved in counseling and divorce prevention education activities at KUA Percut Sei Tuan, Deli Serdang Regency. In addition, this study uses a qualitative descriptive approach based on interview and observation results.

### **Conclusion**

The conclusion of this study shows that the role of Islamic Religious Counselors at KUA Percut Sei Tuan, Deli Serdang Regency is very strategic and effective in reducing divorce cases in early marriages. Counselors not only function as providers of religious advice, but also carry out multifunctional roles as conflict mediators, guides, advisors, and emotional

companions for young couples. Through persuasive, relaxed, dialogic, and non-judgmental approaches, counselors are able to create a safe and comfortable atmosphere so that couples become more open in expressing household problems. This role can be seen from the counselors ability to calm the emotions of couples, help them understand the root of the problem, and direct couples not to rush into making divorce decisions. In several cases, the assistance provided was able to encourage couples to postpone marriage or reconsider divorce in order to think about family readiness and the future.

In addition, this study also concludes that persuasive communication strategies are the main key to the success of counselors in guiding and assisting early marriage couples. The strategies used include two-way communication, the use of simple language, the delivery of religious messages relevant to daily life, and the use of inspirational stories and personal experiences. Adjusting communication methods to the emotional conditions and characteristics of couples, as well as involving families as supporting parties, further strengthens the effectiveness of guidance. The communication effects produced can be seen from changes in the attitudes and behavior of couples, such as reduced emotions, increased awareness of husband and wife responsibilities, and the emergence of willingness to improve relationships voluntarily. Thus, humanistic and contextual persuasive communication has proven to be an important instrument in maintaining household harmony and reducing divorce rates in early marriages in the KUA Percut Sei Tuan, Deli Serdang Regency area.

### **Author Contributions**

The author contributed to the conceptualization of the study, formulation of the research background, and determination of the research methodology. The author also conducted data collection through observation and in-depth interviews at KUA Percut Sei Tuan Kabupaten Deli Serdang. Data analysis, interpretation of findings, literature review, manuscript writing, discussion preparation, and conclusion drafting were carried out by the author. The supervisors provided guidance, suggestions, and direction throughout the research and manuscript preparation process. All parties involved approved the final version of the manuscript.

### **Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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