

Preventing Early Marriage through School-Community Partnerships in Islamic Education

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ABSTRACT

Early marriage remains a persistent social and educational challenge in Indonesia, particularly in rural communities where cultural traditions, economic pressures, and religious interpretations intersect. Despite legal reforms aimed at raising the minimum marriage age, early marriage continues to affect adolescents' educational continuity and well-being. This study aims to document and analyze a community-based educational intervention designed to address early marriage through school-community collaboration in an Islamic educational setting. The intervention was conducted in the form of an educational seminar at an Islamic secondary school, involving students, teachers, and school administrators. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed to capture participant engagement, institutional responses, and perceived outcomes of the program. Data were generated through observation, reflective discussion, and feedback from participants during and after the seminar. The results indicate increased awareness among students regarding the legal, health, and educational implications of early marriage, as well as strengthened institutional reflection among teachers and school leaders concerning their preventive roles. While no immediate behavioral change was observed, the intervention fostered dialogue, shared understanding, and initial commitment to collaborative prevention efforts. This study highlights the potential of school-based community engagement, particularly within Islamic educational institutions, as a culturally grounded entry point for early marriage prevention. Sustained collaboration and broader community involvement are necessary to translate awareness into long-term social change.

KEYWORDS: *early marriage, community engagement, Islamic education, educational seminar, school-community collaboration*

INTRODUCTION

Early marriage continues to be a critical social and educational challenge in many parts of the world, particularly in developing countries where structural inequality, cultural traditions, and limited access to education intersect. Defined as marriage occurring before the age of eighteen, early marriage is widely recognized as a violation of children's rights and a major barrier to human development (Otoo-Oyortey & Pobi, 2003). In Indonesia, despite significant progress in legal reform, early marriage remains prevalent, especially in rural and religiously conservative communities. This persistence indicates that early marriage is not merely a legal

issue but a deeply embedded social practice that requires multidimensional and community-based interventions.

The Indonesian government has demonstrated its commitment to addressing early marriage through the revision of the Marriage Law. Law No. 16 of 2019 amended the previous regulation by equalizing the minimum legal age of marriage for both men and women at nineteen years. This reform aimed to enhance child protection, reduce maternal and infant mortality, and improve educational outcomes for adolescents (Agustina & Ismah, 2024). However, empirical evidence suggests that legal frameworks alone are insufficient to significantly reduce early marriage rates when not accompanied by socialization, education, and community engagement (Chandel et al., 2025; Nasution, 2017). In practice, requests for marriage dispensation through religious courts continue to rise, reflecting the ongoing tension between statutory law and social realities.

From a socio-cultural perspective, early marriage in Indonesia is often driven by a combination of economic vulnerability, limited educational attainment, entrenched gender norms, and cultural expectations surrounding morality and family honor (Efendi & Wahyuningsih, 2024). In some communities, marriage is perceived as a solution to poverty or as a preventive measure against premarital relationships. These perceptions are sometimes reinforced by selective interpretations of religious teachings, which may emphasize permissibility without sufficient attention to readiness, responsibility, and potential harm (Mittermaier, 2014). As a result, adolescents—particularly girls—are frequently encouraged or pressured to marry before completing their education.

The consequences of early marriage are extensive and multidimensional. From an educational standpoint, early marriage is one of the leading causes of school dropout among adolescent girls (Sekine & Hodgkin, 2017). Once married, young women often face increased domestic responsibilities and social expectations that limit their ability to continue schooling. This interruption of education not only constrains individual life opportunities but also perpetuates cycles of poverty and gender inequality across generations (Field & Ambrus, 2008). Studies have consistently shown that delayed marriage is associated with higher levels of educational attainment, improved economic participation, and greater decision-making autonomy (Mehra et al., 2018).

Health-related impacts further underscore the urgency of early marriage prevention. Adolescent pregnancy carries significantly higher risks compared to pregnancy in adulthood, including complications during childbirth, maternal mortality, and low birth weight infants (Ikhsanudin & Nurjanah, 2018). Girls whose bodies are not fully developed face increased vulnerability to obstetric complications such as obstructed labor and obstetric fistula. Beyond physical health, early marriage has been linked to adverse mental health outcomes, including depression, anxiety, and exposure to domestic violence (Pohan & Setiawan, 2024). These risks highlight the need for preventive strategies that integrate health education into broader social interventions.

Education plays a central role in preventing early marriage and mitigating its negative effects. Schools are not only spaces for academic learning but also critical environments for socialization, value formation, and future orientation (LeVine et al., 2012). Sustained participation in education has been identified as one of the most effective protective factors against early marriage, as it delays marital timing while enhancing adolescents' aspirations and life skills (Bajracharya & Amin, 2012). Consequently, educational institutions are strategically positioned to contribute to early marriage prevention efforts.

In the Indonesian context, Islamic educational institutions such as madrasahs occupy a particularly influential role. Madrasahs function not only as formal schools but also as moral and cultural anchors within Muslim communities. They are often trusted sources of religious guidance and social norms, making them uniquely capable of addressing sensitive issues such as marriage through culturally legitimate frameworks (Azra, 2015). When religious teachings are contextualized alongside legal, health, and educational perspectives, Islamic education can serve as a powerful tool for social transformation rather than cultural reproduction alone.

Despite this potential, many Islamic schools operate within communities where early marriage is normalized and even institutionalized through tradition. Parents with limited educational backgrounds may prioritize marriage over schooling, viewing it as a safer or more practical pathway for their children (Fadillah et al., 2024). In such contexts, schools face structural constraints that limit their ability to influence parental decision-making independently. This underscores the importance of collaborative approaches that extend beyond the school walls.

School-community collaboration has emerged as a promising strategy in addressing complex social issues, including early marriage. Community-based educational interventions emphasize partnership, dialogue, and shared ownership of social problems (Israel et al., 2010). By involving school leaders, teachers, students, parents, and external stakeholders—such as higher education institutions and health professionals—these interventions foster collective awareness and responsibility. Rather than positioning communities as passive targets of change, collaborative approaches recognize them as active participants in problem-solving processes.

Within the framework of higher education in Indonesia, community engagement initiatives align with the Tri Dharma Perguruan Tinggi, particularly the mandate of community service (*pengabdian kepada masyarakat*). Universities possess academic resources, research-based knowledge, and human capital that can support schools and communities in addressing socially embedded challenges (Raidar et al., 2025). When university-led programs are designed collaboratively, they can strengthen institutional capacity while ensuring cultural relevance and sustainability.

This article reports findings from a community-based educational intervention in an Islamic secondary school in rural Indonesia aimed at preventing early marriage through school-community collaboration. Implemented as an educational seminar involving students, teachers, school leaders, and university facilitators, the program addressed early marriage from legal, religious, health, and educational perspectives while promoting critical reflection on local practices. Drawing on direct engagement with a school community affected by recurring early marriage cases, the study offers empirical, practice-oriented insights beyond policy-level analysis. The findings indicate that collaborative educational initiatives can enhance institutional awareness, influence attitudes, and reinforce education as a key pathway for adolescent well-being.

Overall, the study highlights that effective early marriage prevention requires sustained, culturally grounded educational efforts that integrate schools, families, religious institutions, and academic actors within a shared framework of responsibility.

METHOD

This study employed a community-based participatory approach within the framework of educational community engagement. The approach was selected to ensure active involvement of key stakeholders within the school community and to promote shared responsibility in addressing the issue of early marriage. Community-based participatory methods emphasize

collaboration between researchers and community members, recognizing local actors as co-producers of knowledge and solutions rather than passive recipients of intervention (Ade Suhara, n.d.). This approach is particularly relevant for socially embedded issues such as early marriage, which are shaped by cultural norms, religious interpretations, and family dynamics.

The intervention was conducted at an Islamic secondary school (Madrasah Aliyah) located in a rural area of Bondowoso Regency, East Java, Indonesia. The school was purposively selected due to recurring cases of early marriage among its students, as identified through preliminary observations and interviews with school leaders. Purposive site selection is commonly used in community engagement research to ensure relevance and contextual depth (Creswell, 2013). The participants involved in the program included school administrators, teachers, educational staff, and students from grades X to XII. This inclusive participation was intended to strengthen institutional ownership of the issue and to foster a shared preventive commitment.

The design of the community engagement activity was descriptive and qualitative in nature. Rather than measuring causal effects statistically, the study focused on documenting processes, participant responses, and perceived changes resulting from the intervention. Qualitative descriptive designs are widely used in community-based educational research to capture contextual dynamics and experiential outcomes that may not be adequately reflected through quantitative indicators (Brunton et al., 2017). The primary form of intervention was an educational seminar addressing early marriage from legal, religious, health, and educational perspectives.

The implementation process consisted of three main stages: preparation, execution, and evaluation. During the preparation stage, a situational analysis was conducted through informal observations and semi-structured interviews with school leaders and selected teachers. This stage aimed to identify local perceptions, contributing factors, and existing challenges related to early marriage. Needs assessment is a critical component of effective community engagement, as it ensures that interventions are contextually grounded and responsive to actual community concerns (O'Mara-Eves et al., 2015).

The execution stage involved the delivery of an educational seminar facilitated by a university lecturer with expertise in Islamic education and social issues, supported by undergraduate students as part of higher education community service. The seminar combined lecture-based explanations with interactive discussion to encourage participant engagement and reflection. Educational seminars have been shown to be effective tools for increasing awareness and reshaping attitudes when combined with dialogical interaction rather than one-way information transfer (Freire, 2021). The content addressed national marriage law, Islamic perspectives on marriage readiness, reproductive health risks, and the educational consequences of early marriage.

The evaluation stage focused on assessing participant engagement and perceived outcomes of the intervention. Evaluation was conducted through direct observation, informal feedback, and reflective discussion with participants following the seminar. Indicators of change included increased awareness, active participation during discussions, and expressed commitment from school stakeholders to strengthen educational guidance related to early marriage prevention. In community-based interventions, reflective evaluation is considered appropriate for capturing early-stage outcomes such as attitudinal shifts and collective awareness (C. V. Patton et al., 2015).

Data generated from observations, discussions, and participant feedback were analyzed using a descriptive thematic approach. The analysis aimed to identify recurring patterns related to awareness, perception change, and institutional response. This approach aligns with the goal

of PKM-oriented research, which prioritizes practical insight and contextual understanding over generalizability (Wekke, n.d.). Ethical considerations were addressed by ensuring voluntary participation, institutional permission, and respectful engagement with participants throughout the activity.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results of the Educational Seminar on Early Marriage and Its Impacts

The educational seminar on early marriage and its impacts conducted at the Islamic secondary school yielded several significant outcomes related to awareness building, participant engagement, and institutional reflection. These results were observed during and after the implementation of the seminar, which involved students, teachers, educational staff, and school administrators. The findings presented in this section focus on immediate and observable changes in understanding, attitudes, and collective responses rather than long-term behavioral transformation, in line with the scope of community-based educational engagement (M. Q. Patton, 2002).

One of the most evident outcomes of the seminar was the increased awareness among students regarding the legal, educational, health, and social implications of early marriage. Prior to the intervention, early marriage was commonly perceived by many students as a culturally accepted practice and, in some cases, as a normative life pathway, particularly for female students. During the seminar sessions and subsequent discussions, students demonstrated a growing recognition that early marriage is subject to legal restrictions under Indonesian law and is associated with significant risks for personal development and future opportunities. This shift in understanding aligns with previous studies indicating that targeted educational interventions can effectively enhance adolescents' awareness of marriage-related risks (Greene et al., 2024).

Students actively engaged in discussions concerning the relationship between early marriage and educational discontinuation. Several participants expressed concerns about the difficulty of continuing formal education after marriage, particularly for young women who are expected to assume domestic responsibilities. These responses reflect a developing awareness of the protective role of education in delaying marriage and improving life outcomes, as emphasized in existing literature (Smith et al., 2012). Although the seminar did not aim to measure changes in intention or behavior quantitatively, the articulation of such concerns suggests an initial cognitive shift toward viewing education as a priority over early marriage.

In addition to student awareness, the seminar contributed to strengthening teachers' and educational staff's understanding of early marriage as an institutional concern rather than solely a family or cultural issue. Teachers reported that cases of early marriage among students had previously been regarded as events beyond the school's sphere of influence (A. J. Hawkins et al., 2004). Through the seminar, educators were encouraged to reflect on their roles in providing guidance, counseling, and continuous mentoring related to life planning and educational aspirations. This finding supports research emphasizing the importance of teacher involvement in preventive educational initiatives addressing social risks faced by adolescents (Halford, 2011).



Figure 1. The Process of Educational Seminar Activities at the Hall of Madrasah Aliyah Miftahul Ulum, February 2025

School administrators also demonstrated increased institutional awareness regarding the prevalence and implications of early marriage within the school community. During reflective discussions, school leaders acknowledged that early marriage had occurred repeatedly among students and had contributed to school dropout and reduced educational continuity. The seminar facilitated a shared understanding among administrators that preventive efforts require proactive engagement, including closer communication with parents and collaboration with external institutions. Such institutional reflection is considered a crucial early outcome in community-based interventions, as it lays the foundation for sustained organizational response (Zulu et al., 2022).

Another important result of the seminar was the emergence of dialogical interaction between different school stakeholders. The seminar format, which combined lecture-based material with interactive discussion, enabled students, teachers, and administrators to participate in a shared learning process. Students were encouraged to ask questions and express their views, while teachers and school leaders responded not only as authority figures but also as co-learners. This dialogical atmosphere is consistent with participatory education principles that emphasize dialogue as a catalyst for critical awareness and social learning ((Freire, 2021).

The involvement of facilitators from a higher education institution further contributed to the credibility and effectiveness of the seminar. Participants perceived the facilitators as authoritative yet approachable sources of information, particularly regarding the integration of Islamic perspectives, legal frameworks, and health considerations related to early marriage. This external academic involvement reinforced the connection between scholarly knowledge and community realities, supporting findings that university-community partnerships can enhance the quality and legitimacy of community engagement initiatives (Ali et al., 2024; Zamroni, 2019).

From a health education perspective, the seminar successfully introduced participants to the reproductive health risks associated with early marriage. Students and teachers demonstrated heightened attention when discussions addressed maternal health complications, adolescent pregnancy risks, and long-term health consequences. This increased

awareness is consistent with global evidence highlighting the importance of health education in early marriage prevention efforts (WHO, 2012). While the seminar did not include clinical assessments or follow-up health interventions, the dissemination of accurate health information represented a critical step toward informed decision-making among adolescents.

At the community level, the seminar prompted reflection on the role of parents and local cultural norms in sustaining early marriage practices. Teachers and administrators acknowledged that parental attitudes, economic pressures, and entrenched traditions continue to influence students' marital decisions. Although parents were not directly involved as participants in the seminar, discussions emphasized the need for future engagement strategies targeting families and community leaders. This recognition aligns with studies indicating that early marriage prevention is most effective when educational interventions are complemented by broader community involvement (Zulu et al., 2022).

Importantly, the outcomes of the seminar were primarily attitudinal and cognitive rather than behavioral. No immediate changes in marriage practices or formal school policies were recorded during the intervention period. However, such outcomes are consistent with the nature of short-term educational interventions, which typically aim to initiate awareness and reflection as prerequisites for longer-term change (Arifin et al., 2025). The expressed commitment from teachers and administrators to strengthen guidance and collaboration represents a meaningful initial outcome within the scope of community service activities.

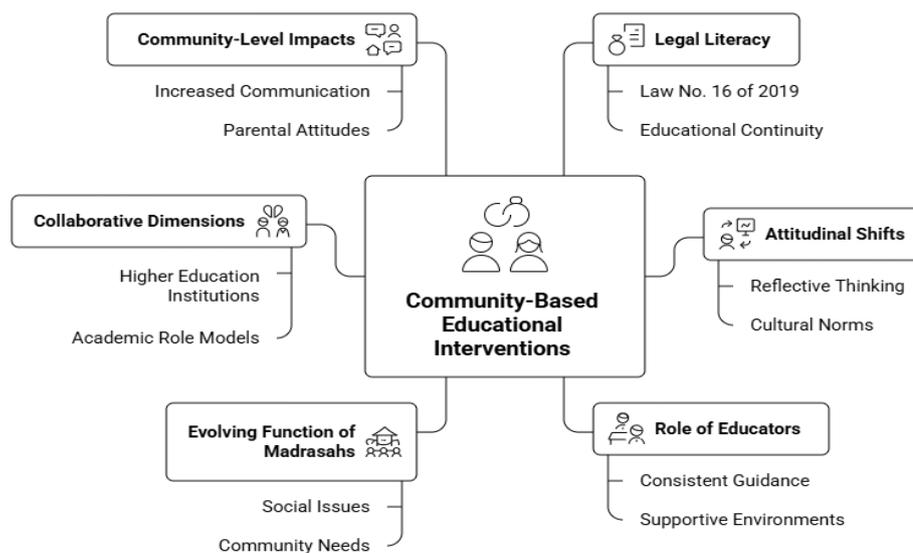


Figure 2 Community-Based Educational Interventions Addressing Early Marriage

Overall, the results of the educational seminar indicate that school-based community engagement can play a constructive role in addressing early marriage within an Islamic educational setting. By increasing awareness, fostering dialogue, and encouraging institutional reflection, the seminar contributed to creating a shared understanding of early marriage as a multidimensional issue requiring collective response. These findings reinforce the value of educational seminars as entry points for broader preventive strategies, particularly when conducted in collaboration with academic institutions and grounded in local educational contexts.

Discussion on Early Marriage Prevention in an Islamic School Context

The results of the educational seminar demonstrate that early marriage prevention within an Islamic school context cannot be approached solely as a legal or moral issue, but must be understood as an educational and social process involving multiple stakeholders. The seminar functioned as an entry point for collective reflection, enabling students, teachers, and school leaders to reframe early marriage as a multidimensional challenge encompassing education, health, religion, and community norms. This finding reinforces the argument that school-based interventions, when embedded in community engagement, can play a meaningful role in addressing socially entrenched practices such as early marriage (Schulz & Parker, 2005)

One of the central insights from this intervention is the importance of awareness as an initial stage of prevention. The increased understanding observed among students regarding the risks and consequences of early marriage aligns with previous studies indicating that cognitive awareness precedes behavioral change (Hikmah et al., 2025). In the context of this study, awareness did not immediately translate into measurable behavioral outcomes, such as delayed marriage decisions. However, this should not be interpreted as a limitation of the intervention. Rather, it reflects the realistic trajectory of educational change, where shifts in perception and attitude constitute necessary foundations for longer-term transformation (C. V. Patton et al., 2015).

The active engagement of teachers and educational staff highlights the institutional dimension of early marriage prevention. Teachers' recognition of early marriage as an educational issue marks an important shift from perceiving it as a private family matter to acknowledging it as a factor directly affecting students' educational continuity. This shift is consistent with research emphasizing that schools serve not only as academic institutions but also as protective social environments that can mitigate risks faced by adolescents (J. D. Hawkins et al., 1999). When educators internalize this role, preventive efforts are more likely to be sustained through guidance, counseling, and mentoring practices.

Within the Islamic educational setting, the integration of religious perspectives played a crucial role in legitimizing the discussion of early marriage. Religious norms often serve as reference points for family and community decisions, including marriage timing. By contextualizing Islamic teachings on marriage readiness, responsibility, and welfare, the seminar helped counter simplistic interpretations that equate permissibility with obligation. This approach aligns with scholarly arguments advocating for contextual and *maqāṣid*-oriented readings of Islamic law that prioritize protection of life, intellect, and lineage (Mittermaier, 2014). Such framing is particularly important in communities where religious justification is frequently invoked to support early marriage.

The dialogical structure of the seminar also contributed significantly to its impact. Rather than adopting a didactic or authoritative tone, the seminar encouraged interaction and discussion across hierarchical roles within the school. Students were given space to articulate their concerns, while teachers and administrators participated as reflective practitioners. This dialogical engagement resonates with Freire's conception of education as a practice of freedom, where dialogue fosters critical consciousness and shared understanding. In community-based educational interventions, this dialogical element is essential for building trust and encouraging collective ownership of social problems (Freire, 2021).

The collaboration between the Islamic school and a higher education institution further strengthened the intervention's credibility. Universities possess symbolic and epistemic authority that can enhance the legitimacy of community-based programs. The involvement of academic facilitators enabled the integration of legal knowledge, health information, and educational perspectives into a coherent narrative accessible to school stakeholders. This

collaboration reflects the broader role of higher education in translating research and expertise into socially responsive practice, in line with the Tri Dharma Perguruan Tinggi (Rustiawan et al., 2025).

Despite these positive outcomes, the discussion must also acknowledge the structural constraints that limit the immediate impact of school-based interventions. Early marriage is deeply embedded in socio-economic conditions, parental authority, and cultural traditions. Teachers and school leaders recognized that economic hardship and parental expectations remain powerful drivers of early marriage decisions. This observation is consistent with existing literature emphasizing that educational interventions alone cannot fully address early marriage without parallel efforts targeting families and community structures (Greene et al., 2023).

The absence of direct parental involvement in the seminar represents both a limitation and an opportunity. While the seminar effectively targeted the school community, its long-term impact would likely be enhanced through systematic engagement with parents and community leaders. Research suggests that interventions involving families are more effective in shifting norms and practices related to early marriage (UNICEF, 2021). Therefore, the seminar can be understood as an initial phase within a broader continuum of community engagement rather than a standalone solution.

To illustrate the scope and nature of observed outcomes, Table 1 summarizes key domains of impact identified during the seminar. The table does not present statistical measurements but rather synthesizes qualitative observations consistent with PKM-oriented evaluation.

Table 1. Summarizes key domains of impact identified during the seminar

Domain of Impact	Key Observations	Nature of Change
Student Awareness	Increased understanding of legal age requirements, health risks, and educational consequences of early marriage	Cognitive and attitudinal
Teacher Engagement	Greater recognition of early marriage as an educational concern requiring guidance and mentoring	Institutional awareness
School Leadership Response	Acknowledgment of recurring early marriage cases and need for preventive collaboration	Reflective and strategic
Religious Understanding	Reframing marriage readiness within Islamic ethical and welfare-oriented perspectives	Normative clarification
Community Orientation	Recognition of parental and cultural influence on early marriage practices	Problem identification
Institutional Collaboration	Strengthened linkage between school and higher education institution	Capacity-building

The table underscores that the primary impacts of the seminar were located at the levels of awareness, reflection, and institutional readiness. These outcomes are consistent with the objectives of community-based educational interventions, which prioritize empowerment and capacity-building over immediate behavioral metrics (Sandelowski, 2000). By documenting these outcomes, the study contributes practice-based evidence to the literature on early marriage prevention in educational settings.

From a policy and practice perspective, the findings suggest that Islamic schools can serve as strategic entry points for early marriage prevention when supported through collaboration and capacity-building. Schools that are culturally embedded and religiously legitimate possess

unique leverage to engage sensitive issues constructively. However, this potential can only be realized when schools are not isolated actors but part of a broader network involving families, religious authorities, health services, and higher education institutions.

In sum, this discussion demonstrates that the educational seminar functioned as a meaningful starting point for early marriage prevention within an Islamic school context. By fostering awareness, dialogue, and institutional reflection, the intervention contributed to reframing early marriage as a shared educational and social concern. While the outcomes remain preliminary, they highlight the promise of school–community collaboration as a culturally grounded and educationally oriented strategy for addressing early marriage. Sustained engagement, expanded stakeholder involvement, and integration into ongoing school programs are necessary next steps to translate these initial gains into long-term social change.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that educational seminars conducted within an Islamic school setting can serve as an effective initial strategy for addressing early marriage through school–community collaboration. The community-based intervention implemented at the Islamic secondary school provided a structured space for students, teachers, and school leaders to engage collectively with the issue of early marriage from legal, religious, health, and educational perspectives. Rather than positioning early marriage solely as a legal violation or moral concern, the seminar facilitated a broader understanding of early marriage as a multidimensional challenge that directly affects educational continuity and adolescent well-being.

The findings indicate that the primary outcomes of the intervention were located at the levels of awareness, reflection, and institutional readiness. Students demonstrated increased understanding of the risks and consequences associated with early marriage, particularly in relation to educational disruption and reproductive health. Teachers and school administrators exhibited heightened awareness of their roles in providing guidance and preventive education, recognizing early marriage as an issue that warrants institutional attention rather than passive acceptance. These outcomes suggest that awareness-building within educational environments is a critical first step in early marriage prevention efforts.

Importantly, this study highlights the strategic role of Islamic educational institutions in mediating social change within religious and cultural communities. By integrating Islamic ethical perspectives with legal and health information, the seminar helped clarify misconceptions that often legitimize early marriage practices. This approach reinforces the potential of madrasahs to function not only as sites of religious instruction but also as agents of social transformation when supported through collaborative engagement.

However, the study also underscores that short-term educational interventions are insufficient to generate immediate behavioral change in deeply rooted social practices. Early marriage is influenced by structural factors such as economic pressure, parental authority, and cultural norms that extend beyond the school context. As such, the seminar should be understood as an entry point within a broader continuum of preventive efforts rather than a standalone solution. Sustained engagement involving parents, community leaders, and relevant institutions is necessary to translate increased awareness into long-term change.

In conclusion, school–community collaboration, when grounded in educational dialogue and cultural legitimacy, offers a promising pathway for early marriage prevention in Islamic educational settings. By fostering shared understanding and institutional commitment, educational seminars can contribute meaningfully to broader efforts aimed at protecting adolescents' rights, promoting educational continuity, and strengthening community

responsibility. Future initiatives should build upon this foundation by expanding stakeholder involvement and integrating preventive education into ongoing school and community programs.

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CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest associated with this study. The community engagement activity and the preparation of this manuscript were conducted solely as part of the academic community service mandate of a higher education institution. This study did not receive financial support from commercial entities, private organizations, or external funding agencies. The authors also confirm that no personal, professional, or institutional relationships influenced the design of the program, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of findings, or the writing of this article.

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