

THE ROLE OF ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS COUNSELORS IN MINIMIZING DIVORCE CASES IN LARANGAN DISTRICT, BREBES REGENCY**Nurkhojin^{*1}, Rohidin²**Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam (STAI) Brebes^{1,2}**Email*:** mkhojin123@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study examines the role of Islamic Religious Extension Workers in minimizing divorce cases in Larangan District, Brebes Regency, Indonesia. The increasing number of divorce cases in Indonesian society has become a social and religious concern that requires preventive efforts involving various stakeholders, including Islamic Religious Extension Workers under the Ministry of Religious Affairs. This research aims to analyze the strategies, functions, and effectiveness of Islamic Religious Extension Workers in providing premarital guidance, family counseling, religious education, and mediation for married couples experiencing domestic conflicts. The study employed a qualitative approach with a field research design. Data were collected through observations, in-depth interviews with Islamic Religious Extension Workers, community leaders, and married couples, as well as documentation studies. The collected data were analyzed using data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing techniques. The findings indicate that Islamic Religious Extension Workers play significant roles as educators, counselors, mediators, and motivators in strengthening family resilience and preventing divorce. Their activities include premarital counseling programs, religious lectures on family harmony, individual counseling sessions, and mediation efforts for couples facing marital disputes. However, several challenges were identified, including limited human resources, low public awareness of counseling services, and socio-economic factors contributing to marital conflicts. The study concludes that strengthening the capacity and outreach of Islamic Religious Extension Workers is essential to reducing divorce rates and promoting harmonious families within the community.

Keywords: Islamic Religious Extension Workers, Divorce Prevention, Family Counseling, Islamic Guidance, Family Resilience.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji peran Penyuluh Agama Islam dalam meminimalisir kasus perceraian di Kecamatan Larangan, Kabupaten Brebes. Meningkatnya angka perceraian di masyarakat menjadi persoalan sosial dan keagamaan yang memerlukan upaya pencegahan melalui keterlibatan berbagai pihak, termasuk Penyuluh Agama Islam yang berada di bawah naungan Kementerian Agama. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis strategi, fungsi, dan efektivitas peran Penyuluh Agama Islam dalam memberikan bimbingan pranikah, konseling keluarga, penyuluhan keagamaan, serta mediasi bagi pasangan suami istri yang mengalami

konflik rumah tangga. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan jenis penelitian lapangan (field research). Data diperoleh melalui observasi, wawancara mendalam dengan Penyuluh Agama Islam, tokoh masyarakat, dan pasangan suami istri, serta studi dokumentasi. Data yang terkumpul dianalisis menggunakan teknik reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Penyuluh Agama Islam memiliki peran yang signifikan sebagai edukator, konselor, mediator, dan motivator dalam memperkuat ketahanan keluarga serta mencegah terjadinya perceraian. Bentuk kegiatan yang dilakukan meliputi program bimbingan perkawinan, penyuluhan tentang keluarga sakinah, layanan konsultasi keluarga, serta mediasi terhadap pasangan yang mengalami perselisihan rumah tangga. Namun demikian, terdapat beberapa kendala yang dihadapi, antara lain keterbatasan sumber daya manusia, rendahnya kesadaran masyarakat untuk memanfaatkan layanan konsultasi, serta faktor ekonomi dan sosial yang turut memengaruhi terjadinya konflik keluarga. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa penguatan kapasitas dan perluasan jangkauan layanan Penyuluh Agama Islam sangat diperlukan untuk menekan angka perceraian dan mewujudkan keluarga yang harmonis, sakinah, mawaddah, dan rahmah di tengah masyarakat. **Kata kunci:** Penyuluh Agama Islam, perceraian, bimbingan keluarga, keluarga sakinah, ketahanan keluarga.

A. Introduction

The family is the smallest social institution that plays a strategic role in creating a harmonious, prosperous, and civilized society. In the Islamic perspective, marriage is not merely a legal bond between a man and a woman but also an act of worship and a means to establish a family characterized by *sakinah* (tranquility), *mawaddah* (affection), and *rahmah* (compassion) as stated in the Qur'an, Surah Ar-Rum verse 21. Therefore, maintaining family harmony and marital stability becomes one of the primary objectives of family life in Islam (Al-Qaradawi, 2007).

However, contemporary social realities indicate that divorce rates in Indonesia have continued to increase in recent years. Various factors such as economic difficulties, prolonged marital conflicts, lack of effective communication between spouses, domestic violence, infidelity, and the influence of social media have contributed significantly to the rising number of divorce cases (Amato, 2010; BPS, 2024). Divorce not only affects husbands and wives but also creates psychological, social, and economic consequences for children and the wider family environment (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002).

Brebes Regency is among the regions experiencing a considerable number of divorce cases, including in Larangan District. Most divorce cases in this area are associated with economic problems, limited understanding of marital rights and obligations, and

inadequate conflict resolution skills among married couples (Religious Court of Brebes, 2024). This phenomenon requires preventive and curative measures involving various stakeholders, including government institutions, religious leaders, and community organizations, to strengthen family resilience and reduce divorce rates.

In this context, Islamic Religious Extension Workers occupy a strategic position as representatives of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in fostering religious and social development within the community. Their responsibilities extend beyond religious preaching to include roles as educators, counselors, advocates, mediators, and motivators in addressing socio-religious issues, including marital disputes that may lead to divorce (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2019). Through religious counseling activities, premarital education, family consultation services, and mediation programs, Islamic Religious Extension Workers are expected to provide guidance and assistance to married couples in maintaining family integrity and harmony.

Previous studies have demonstrated that premarital education and family counseling based on Islamic values contribute positively to improving marital relationships and strengthening family resilience (Olson & DeFrain, 2014; Walsh, 2016). Nevertheless, studies specifically examining the role of Islamic Religious Extension Workers in minimizing divorce cases at the district level, particularly in Larangan District of Brebes Regency, remain limited. Most previous research has focused primarily on the causes of divorce or the role of religious courts in resolving divorce cases (Nasution, 2021).

Accordingly, there is a research gap concerning the effectiveness of Islamic Religious Extension Workers in divorce prevention efforts at the community level. This study seeks to fill this gap by analyzing the roles, strategies, and challenges faced by Islamic Religious Extension Workers in minimizing divorce cases in Larangan District, Brebes Regency.

This study aims to describe and analyze the role of Islamic Religious Extension Workers in minimizing divorce cases, identify the strategies employed in family development and counseling, and examine the supporting and inhibiting factors influencing the implementation of religious extension activities. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of Islamic guidance and counseling studies and serve as a reference for the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Office of Religious Affairs (*KUA*), and other stakeholders

in formulating policies aimed at strengthening family resilience and preventing divorce within society.

B. Research Method

This study employed a qualitative approach with a field research design to examine the role of Islamic Religious Extension Workers in minimizing divorce cases in Larangan District, Brebes Regency. The qualitative method was selected because it enables researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding of social phenomena, particularly regarding the experiences, perceptions, and strategies of Islamic Religious Extension Workers in preventing marital conflicts and maintaining family resilience within the community (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The research was conducted in Larangan District, Brebes Regency, Central Java, Indonesia, where divorce cases have become a social concern requiring preventive intervention from religious institutions and community stakeholders. The participants of this study consisted of Islamic Religious Extension Workers serving under the Office of Religious Affairs (*Kantor Urusan Agama/KUA*) of Larangan District, religious leaders, community leaders, and married couples who had participated in counseling, mediation, or family guidance programs. Informants were selected through purposive sampling based on their experience, knowledge, and involvement in religious counseling and divorce prevention activities, allowing the researcher to obtain rich and relevant information related to the research objectives (Sugiyono, 2022).

Data collection was carried out through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation studies to ensure the comprehensiveness and credibility of the findings. Observations were conducted to understand the implementation of counseling programs, premarital guidance sessions, family consultations, and mediation activities organized by Islamic Religious Extension Workers within the community. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken to explore the roles, strategies, challenges, and effectiveness of extension workers in reducing divorce cases and strengthening family harmony. In addition, documentation studies were used to examine counseling reports, family guidance records, institutional documents, and statistical data related to divorce cases in Larangan District. To ensure data validity and trustworthiness, the study applied source triangulation and

method triangulation by comparing information obtained from different participants and data collection techniques (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The collected data were analyzed using the interactive analysis model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification, which were conducted continuously throughout the research process to produce reliable and comprehensive findings.

C. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that Islamic Religious Extension Workers play a significant role in minimizing divorce cases in Larangan District, Brebes Regency, through preventive, educative, and mediative approaches. Their preventive role is primarily implemented through premarital counseling programs, religious education, and family guidance activities aimed at strengthening prospective couples' understanding of marital responsibilities and Islamic family values. The extension workers emphasized the importance of communication, mutual respect, and the fulfillment of rights and obligations between spouses as essential foundations for establishing a harmonious family. This finding supports the argument that religious education and premarital preparation contribute positively to marital quality and reduce the likelihood of divorce among newly married couples (Olson & DeFrain, 2014). Furthermore, Islamic teachings concerning the principles of *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah* provide a moral and spiritual framework that encourages couples to resolve conflicts peacefully and maintain family stability (Al-Qaradawi, 2007).

Another important role identified in this study is the function of Islamic Religious Extension Workers as counselors and educators within the community. Through regular religious gatherings, community meetings, and family counseling sessions, extension workers provide guidance on conflict management, parenting, financial responsibility, and emotional communication between spouses. These counseling activities not only improve religious understanding but also enhance couples' social and psychological readiness in facing household challenges. Such findings are consistent with previous studies indicating that counseling services based on religious values contribute significantly to strengthening

family resilience and reducing marital dissatisfaction (Walsh, 2016). In the context of Larangan District, counseling programs have become an accessible and culturally acceptable mechanism for families seeking advice before conflicts escalate into divorce proceedings.

The study also reveals the important mediative role played by Islamic Religious Extension Workers in resolving marital disputes. Couples experiencing prolonged conflicts are often invited to participate in mediation sessions facilitated by extension workers in cooperation with religious leaders, community leaders, and officers from the Office of Religious Affairs (*KUA*). During these sessions, both parties are encouraged to express their concerns, identify the roots of their conflicts, and seek mutually beneficial solutions based on Islamic values and family ethics. Mediation serves as an alternative dispute resolution mechanism that prioritizes reconciliation rather than separation, reflecting the Islamic principle that divorce, although permissible, is the most disliked lawful act before God (Nasution, 2021). This finding demonstrates that community-based mediation can effectively reduce tensions and provide opportunities for marital reconciliation.

The effectiveness of these mediation efforts is strongly influenced by the trust and social legitimacy enjoyed by Islamic Religious Extension Workers within the community. Many couples perceive extension workers as neutral parties possessing both religious authority and social credibility, making them more willing to disclose sensitive family issues during counseling sessions. This social capital becomes an important asset in facilitating communication between conflicting spouses and encouraging compromise and forgiveness. Previous studies have shown that community trust is a crucial factor determining the success of counseling and mediation programs in family-related disputes (Putnam, 2000). Therefore, strengthening the professional competence and ethical standards of extension workers is essential for maintaining public confidence in their services.

Despite these important contributions, several challenges limit the effectiveness of Islamic Religious Extension Workers in minimizing divorce cases. One of the most significant obstacles is the limited number of extension workers compared to the size of the population they serve. This imbalance reduces the frequency and coverage of counseling programs, particularly in rural communities with limited access to religious and social

services. Additionally, insufficient institutional support and limited operational resources often hinder the implementation of intensive family assistance programs. Similar challenges have been reported in studies on religious counseling services in Indonesia, where human resource limitations frequently affect service quality and outreach (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2019).

Economic problems were also identified as one of the dominant factors contributing to divorce cases in Larangan District. Financial instability, unemployment, and unequal economic responsibilities between spouses often generate prolonged tensions that eventually lead to marital breakdown. Although Islamic Religious Extension Workers provide counseling related to patience, financial management, and family responsibility, structural economic problems cannot be resolved solely through religious guidance. This finding supports previous research emphasizing that divorce is a multidimensional issue influenced by social, cultural, and economic variables in addition to religious factors (Amato, 2010). Consequently, collaboration between religious institutions, local governments, and social welfare agencies is necessary to address the broader determinants of marital instability.

Another challenge concerns the low level of public awareness regarding the importance of counseling services before marital problems become severe. Many couples seek assistance only after conflicts have escalated to the point where reconciliation becomes increasingly difficult. Cultural perceptions that consider domestic problems as private matters often discourage families from consulting extension workers at an early stage. This situation highlights the need for proactive outreach strategies and community education programs designed to normalize family counseling as a preventive rather than reactive intervention (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). Increasing public literacy regarding family resilience and conflict management could significantly improve the effectiveness of divorce prevention initiatives.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that Islamic Religious Extension Workers have a strategic and multifaceted role in minimizing divorce cases through education, counseling, mediation, and community empowerment. Their contribution extends beyond religious instruction to include social intervention and family development efforts aimed at

promoting harmonious and resilient households. However, the effectiveness of these efforts depends on adequate institutional support, community participation, and intersectoral collaboration involving governmental and non-governmental stakeholders. Strengthening the capacity of Islamic Religious Extension Workers through continuous training, professional development, and policy support is therefore essential for improving family welfare and reducing divorce rates in Larangan District and other regions facing similar challenges.

D. Conclusion

This study concludes that Islamic Religious Extension Workers play a strategic and multidimensional role in minimizing divorce cases in Larangan District, Brebes Regency. Their contributions are manifested through educational, counseling, mediating, and motivational functions aimed at strengthening family resilience and promoting harmonious marital relationships. Through premarital guidance programs, religious counseling, family consultation services, and mediation efforts, Islamic Religious Extension Workers provide preventive interventions that help couples understand their rights and responsibilities, improve communication skills, and resolve marital conflicts constructively before they escalate into divorce proceedings.

However, the effectiveness of these efforts is influenced by several supporting and inhibiting factors. Limited human resources, inadequate institutional support, low public awareness regarding the importance of family counseling, and socio-economic challenges remain significant obstacles in reducing divorce rates. Therefore, strengthening the capacity of Islamic Religious Extension Workers through continuous professional development, expanding counseling services, and enhancing collaboration among the Ministry of Religious Affairs, local government institutions, community organizations, and religious leaders are necessary steps to improve family welfare and reduce divorce cases. The study highlights that sustainable and collaborative family guidance programs are essential for building resilient families and achieving the Islamic ideal of *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah* households within society.

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