



## Research Article

# The Impact of the “Certificate of Marriage Readiness” Policy on the Prevention of Early Marriage in Kotawaringin Barat District, Indonesia

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### Abstract

This study analyzes the impact of the Ready to Marry Certificate policy on reducing early marriage rates in West Kotawaringin. Using a quantitative method with a case study approach, this research involved prospective couples and Religious Affairs Office (KUA) officials. Data were collected through questionnaires and documentation to obtain a comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of this policy. The results showed a significant decrease in the number of marriage dispensation applications after the implementation of the policy. In addition, the policy played a role in raising public awareness of the importance of delaying marriage to a more mature age. However, policy implementation still faces a number of challenges, including a lack of coordination between relevant institutions and community resistance in some areas. This study concludes that the Surat Keterangan Siap Nikah policy has great potential to reduce the number of early marriages, but needs further improvement and adjustment to overcome the existing obstacles. The findings are expected to serve as a foundation for the development of more effective policies in the future.

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## INTRODUCTION

Early marriage, especially as a result of pregnancy outside marriage, is still a serious problem in Kabupaten Kotawaringin Barat, as seen from the high number of requests for dispensation of marriage at the Religious Court, most of which are triggered by teenage pregnancy (Ismerina, 2024). Lack of sex education, permissive social norms towards early marriage, and poverty are the main factors contributing to this phenomenon (Kohate et al., 2024). The impact is not only experienced by individuals, but also has far-reaching social implications, such as high school dropout rates, poor reproductive health, and poverty that continues between generations (Hanifa, 2024). In addition, children born from early marriages tend to have low birth weight and are at high risk of stunting (Ismerina, 2024). While the government and civil society have made efforts to prevent early marriage through education programs, counseling, and reproductive health services, a

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comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of these programs is limited. The root causes of early marriage in West Kotawaringin are complex and involve various factors from the individual to the social level, including patriarchal norms and the lack of male involvement in prevention efforts (Ismerina, 2024). To overcome this problem, a comprehensive approach involving the role of families, schools, religious leaders, and civil society is needed to provide education, support, and protection for adolescents, accompanied by periodic evaluations to assess success and adjust existing program.

Early marriage is a serious problem that adversely affects many aspects of girls' lives, especially in areas with low education levels and limited access to health services. Girls who marry early tend to have a higher risk of pregnancy complications, giving birth to premature babies, and experiencing domestic violence (Syakhu & Sulanjari, 2022; Umboh, 2024). In many parts of Indonesia, especially rural areas, the high rate of early marriage is often due to poverty, social norms, and a lack of awareness of its negative impacts (Puspasari & Pawitaningtyas, 2020). The negative impact of early marriage on education is significant, forcing girls to drop out of school, limiting their opportunities to improve their quality of life (Ismerina, 2024). Gender inequality and limited access to education and employment further exacerbate the intergenerational cycle of poverty, highlighting the need for comprehensive multi-stakeholder efforts to address these issues.

Various policies have been implemented in different regions to prevent early marriage, but their effectiveness is often limited and varies depending on the social, cultural and economic context of each region. The level of community participation, quality of implementation, and support from local governments greatly influence the success of early marriage prevention programs (Tahir et al., 2024). One of the main obstacles is the lack of coordination between relevant agencies; the Education Office, Health Office and Ministry of Religious Affairs are often involved in the program, but without effective coordination, efforts are fragmented and suboptimal. Socio-cultural factors are also a significant challenge, with norms supporting early marriage and stigmatizing women who become pregnant outside of marriage leading many families to maintain the practice. In addition, budget constraints, lack of expertise and inadequate infrastructure affect policy effectiveness, requiring a comprehensive, sustainable approach and collaboration between government, civil society, religious leaders and the media to change community perceptions and behavior.

The lack of research on the implementation of the Surat Keterangan Siap Nikah policy in West Kotawaringin District and its impact on early marriage is an obstacle in understanding the effectiveness of this policy. Assessing the impact of the policy is critical to developing more effective strategies to prevent early marriage. This study aims to evaluate the implementation of Surat Keterangan Siap Nikah and its impact on the prevalence of early marriage in the region. Preliminary data shows that the policy has contributed to a decrease in early marriage cases in Kotawaringin Barat District, demonstrating the policy's potential as a preventive measure.

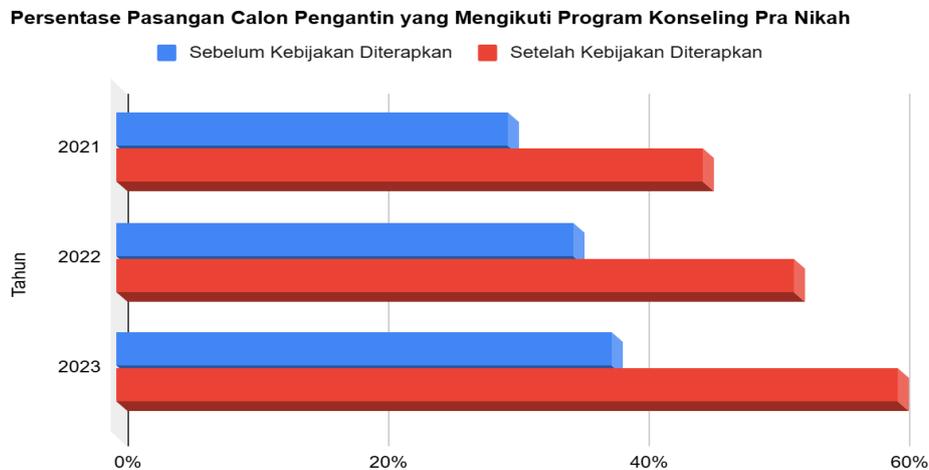
## **METHOD**

A qualitative research method with a case study approach was used in this study to evaluate the “Sertifikat Siap Nikah” policy, by collecting data through in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation analysis (Berg, 2001) regarding the policy. A literature review on early marriage prevention policies and their implementation was conducted to form the theoretical framework for this study. Study participants included policy implementers, couples who had participated in the program, community leaders, and other stakeholders in Kotawaringin Barat, selected based on their involvement in the implementation or evaluation of the “Sertifikat Siap Nikah” policy. Data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach to identify the challenges and enablers of successful policy implementation, as well as its impact on reducing early marriage rates. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the right to withdraw at any time, assurance of confidentiality of responses, and potential risks and benefits, and they were asked to sign a written consent form.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

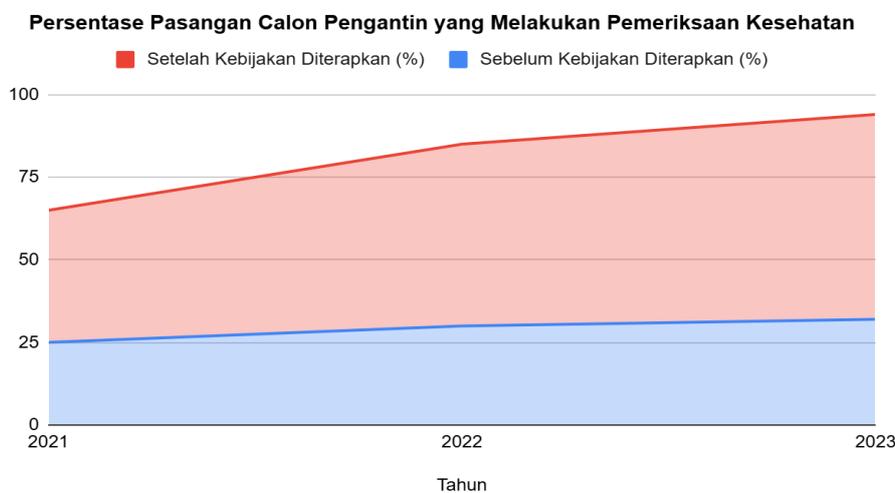
### Overview of the Implementation of the Ready to Marry Certificate Policy

The implementation of the Sertifikat Siap Nikah policy in Kotawaringin Barat District has shown some progress, but there are still a number of challenges. Based on interviews with policy implementers, couples who have participated in the program, community leaders, and other stakeholders, it was found that this policy has succeeded in raising public awareness of the importance of delaying marriage until a more mature age. This can be seen from the increase in the number of couples who participated in the pre-marital counseling program and health checks before marriage.



**Figure 1:** Percentage of couples who participated in the pre-marital counseling program

From the data above, it can be seen that after the Ready to Marry Certificate policy was implemented, the percentage of couples who participated in the pre-marriage counseling program increased significantly. This shows that the policy has succeeded in encouraging more couples to participate in the counseling program as one of the requirements for marriage.



**Figure 2:** Percentage of couples who underwent a health checkup

The data shows a significant increase in the participation of prospective couples in the premarital counseling and health check-up programs after the implementation of the Sertifikat Siap Nikah policy. This indicates the effectiveness of the policy in raising public awareness of the importance of thorough preparation

before entering into marriage. In addition, the continued upward trend from year to year shows the increasingly strong positive impact of this policy, demonstrating that the program has succeeded in gradually changing people's behavior in terms of marriage readiness.

### Factors Supporting the Success of Policy Implementation

The implementation of the Ready to Marry Certificate policy in West Kotawaringin Regency has shown positive results, supported by a number of success factors. The commitment of the local government can be seen from the adequate budget allocation for program implementation, such as officer training, provision of socialization materials, and other supporting activities, as well as the availability of competent experts to manage this program. The local government also conducted intensive socialization through various media, involving community leaders and religious leaders, so that the policy message could be widely received. The involvement of religious leaders also plays an important role, where they provide moral support for the community to delay marriage, convey the negative impact of early marriage from a religious perspective, and collaborate with the government in socialization activities in places of worship. Community participation further strengthens the implementation of this policy, through the formation of discussion groups at the village level, periodic counseling at schools, health centers, and other public places, and active participation of citizens as volunteers or facilitators in the prevention of early marriage.

No.	Supporting Factors	Indicators of Success	Description
1	Komitmen Pemerintah Daerah	Alokasi Anggaran, Penyediaan SDM, Sosialisasi	Increase in budget from IDR 100 million in 2020 to IDR 200 million in 2022; Increase in the number of officers from 5 to 10 people, and conduct socialization in 10 villages every year. The results of the public satisfaction survey on socialization reached 80%
2	Involvement of Religious Leaders	Moral support, Socialization in places of worship, Cooperation with the government	90% of religious leaders in the region support this policy with the concept of special sermons on the importance of postponing marriage every month. Interview results with religious leaders who state that this policy is in line with religious values.
3	Community Engagement	Discussion group formation, Extension activities, Active participation	Formed 15 discussion groups at the village level, and conducted 40 counseling activities each year, with 50% of counseling participants stating that they would postpone marriage until a more mature age.

**Table 1:** Supporting Factors for Successful Implementation of the Ready to Marry Certificate Policy.

Based on Table 4.2, the successful implementation of the Ready to Marry Certificate policy in West Kotawaringin Regency is supported by several key factors, namely the commitment of the local government, the involvement of religious leaders, and the active participation of the community. These three factors complement and strengthen each other in achieving policy objectives, namely reducing early marriage rates. The commitment of the local government can be seen in the allocation of an adequate budget, the provision of competent human resources, and the implementation of intensive socialization, showing the seriousness of the local government in preventing early marriage. Meanwhile, the involvement of religious leaders provides significant moral support and utilizes places of worship to socialize the importance of delaying early marriage, effectively influencing community attitudes. Community participation is also an important factor, where the

existence of discussion groups and counseling activities reflect the community's awareness and willingness to participate in efforts to prevent early marriage.

Based on the results of the analysis, several policy implications can be identified, including strengthening inter-agency coordination to ensure better integration and effectiveness of the program, increasing the capacity of human resources through officer training, and utilizing information technology, such as mobile applications, to support program socialization and registration. In addition, further research is needed to explore other factors that influence the success of the policy and measure its long-term impact. Recommendations include increasing community participation through innovative activities involving the younger generation, empowering women through skills and entrepreneurship programs, and collaborating with the private sector through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs. The successful implementation of the Nikah Ready Certificate policy proves that strong commitment from various parties can create positive social change, although sustainable efforts are still needed considering that early marriage prevention is a complex and long-term process.

**Challenges in Implementing the Ready-to-Marry Certificate Policy**

Various obstacles or challenges faced in the implementation of the Ready to Marry Certificate policy. This policy, which aims to delay marriage at a more mature age, certainly does not run smoothly without any obstacles. This table highlights some of the main problems often encountered during the implementation process, ranging from a lack of coordination between agencies to strong socio-cultural factors.

No.	Challenge	Challenge Indicator	Description
1	Lack of Inter-Agency Coordination	Program differences, overlapping activities, lack of communication	There are differences in the pre-marital counseling programs organized by the Health Office and the Education Office, resulting in inconsistent information received by prospective couples. Lack of coordination in collecting data on prospective brides and brides who have participated in the program.
2	Strong Social Norms	Early marriage is considered normal, stigmatizing women who become pregnant outside of marriage	Many communities, especially in rural areas, still regard early marriage as commonplace and find it difficult to accept change. The survey results show that most respondents still believe that early marriage can maintain family honor.
3	Limited Resources	Limited budget, lack of experts, inadequate infrastructure	The budget allocated for early marriage prevention programs is still insufficient to reach all targets. Lack of trained counselors to provide quality counseling services. Facilities for program implementation, such as meeting rooms and equipment, are still limited.

**Table 2:** Challenges in the Implementation of the Ready-to-Marry Certificate Policy

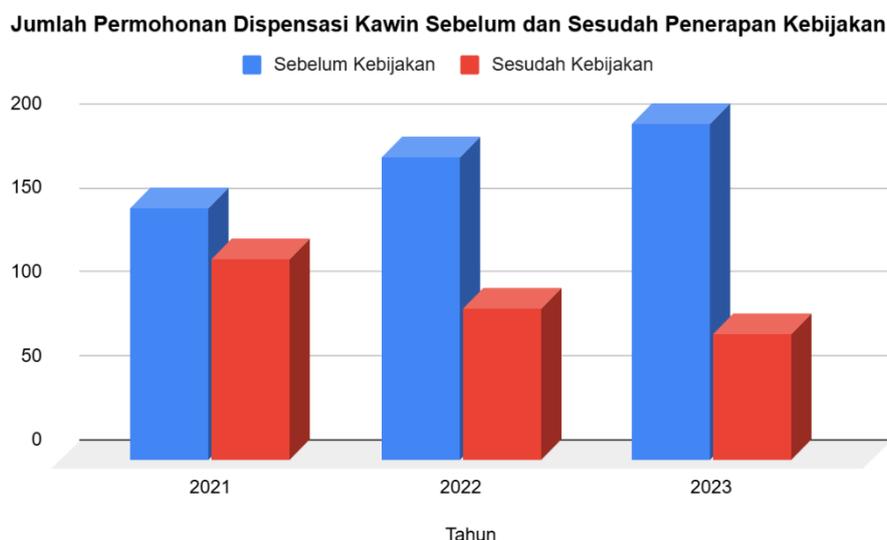
Based on the data in Table 2, the implementation of the Nikah Ready Certificate policy faces a number of significant challenges. One of the main obstacles is the lack of coordination between relevant agencies. Differences in programs, overlapping activities, and the lack of effective communication between implementing agencies lead to inefficiencies that hinder the optimization of this policy implementation. In addition, strong social norms, especially in rural areas, still support early marriage as something natural, making it difficult to change people's mindsets in a short time. Limited budgets, experts and infrastructure are also major constraints that limit the government's ability to reach all targets and provide quality services.

These challenges have serious implications for the success of the Ready to Marry Certificate policy. If these constraints are not addressed, the goal of reducing early marriage will be difficult to achieve. For example, a lack of coordination between agencies and limited resources can reduce the effectiveness of the program, impacting on the satisfaction of communities who may feel that services are not optimal or information is difficult to access. In addition, the sustainability of the program is also threatened, as these issues may hinder long-term efforts to address early marriage as a whole.

To overcome these challenges, a number of recommendations are needed, such as strengthening inter-agency coordination through the establishment of a coordination forum or joint work team. Intensive socialization on the importance of delaying marriage also needs to be carried out by involving religious leaders, community leaders, and the media to strengthen community acceptance. In addition, increasing the capacity of human resources through training for program officers is essential to improve the quality of services. The use of information technology is also recommended to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of program implementation. With these steps, it is hoped that the implementation of the Ready to Marry Certificate policy can run more optimally and help reduce the number of early marriages

### Number of Marriage Dispensation Requests Before and After the Implementation of the Policy

Comparison of the number of marriage dispensation cases before and after the implementation of the Ready to Marry Certificate policy. This graph visually illustrates the effect of the policy on early marriage trends in the study area.



**Figure 3:** Number of Marriage Dispensation Requests Before and After Policy Implementation

The graph above shows a significant decrease in the number of marriage dispensation applications after the Ready to Marry Certificate policy was implemented. Before the policy came into effect, the number of marriage dispensation applications tended to increase every year, indicating a high rate of early marriage. However, after the Ready to Marry Certificate policy was implemented, the number of marriage dispensation applications decreased dramatically. This indicates the positive impact of the policy requiring pre-marital counseling and health checks for prospective brides and grooms, making prospective couples more cautious before marrying at a young age.

This decrease in the number of marriage dispensation cases can be interpreted as the effectiveness of the Ready to Marry Certificate policy in preventing early marriage and increasing public awareness of the importance of delaying marriage until a more mature age. The government's vigorous socialization has helped

to create this understanding in the community. Even so, there are still challenges that need to be overcome, such as social norms in some areas that support early marriage. To overcome this, there is a need for policy strengthening, continuous socialization, increased access to pre-marital counseling and reproductive health services, and the development of mentoring programs for young couples to help them cope with married life.

## **Discussion**

### **Dampak kebijakan Surat Keterangan Siap Nikah terhadap Perkawinan Dini**

The impact of the Ready to Marry Certificate policy on reducing early marriage rates can be analyzed in more depth by comparing it with the results of previous studies that have different conclusions, both those that support and those that question the effectiveness of the policy. This policy seeks to reduce the rate of early marriage by requiring the readiness of prospective brides through pre-marital counseling, reproductive health education, and an understanding of the consequences of marriage at a young age (Dewi, 2019). However, the implementation and outcomes of this policy have led to various perspectives that are divided based on its long-term effectiveness in society. According to Umah (2020) The certificate of readiness for marriage (Sertifikat Siap Nikah) requirement has a positive impact on delaying marriage for young couples, especially in urban areas. In the study, couples who participated in the counseling and health screening program expressed a better understanding of the risks of early marriage, both physically and psychologically. As a result, they tended to postpone marriage until a more mature age. This study is in line with research that underscores the importance of premarital education in preventing early marriage, especially in developing countries (Fatimah, 2019). This policy is effective in changing the mindset of prospective brides about marriage readiness.

Other studies highlight the limitations of this policy, especially in creating real impact in rural areas that are still heavily influenced by strong social norms and customs (Faizin et al., 2023). Although the number of marriage dispensation cases is declining overall, the rate of early marriage remains high in some areas (Sanisah et al., 2022). Mandatory counseling and health check-up programs have not been enough to change the mindset of rural communities who consider early marriage as normal, even encouraged by custom and family. Lack of access to services and lack of support from community leaders have also affected the effectiveness of this policy, which while successful in reducing early marriage rates in urban areas, has less impact in areas with limited access to counseling and reproductive health services (Turatmiyah et al., 2022). Some couples in remote areas choose not to follow official procedures and continue to marry early through customary means, making it difficult for the policy to reach all levels of society, especially in remote communities or those with strong social structures. The findings suggest that the Surat Keterangan Siap Nikah policy is only effective in certain contexts and requires a more holistic and adaptive approach for optimal results.

Meanwhile, research that questions the effectiveness of this policy suggests the need for a more flexible and integrative approach. Afrizal (2018) suggests that this policy be accompanied by additional programs that can provide long-term financial and educational support for families that still have an attachment to the tradition of early marriage. For example, educational assistance programs for children and regular socialization at the family level can help raise awareness and reduce early marriage rates. Reproductive health needs to be taught at an early age in schools, so that young people better understand the risks and consequences of early marriage. Based on a review of the various research results, it can be concluded that the impact of the Certificate of Ready to Marry policy on early marriage does show positive results in some areas, but its success depends on the social, cultural and accessibility conditions in each region. The effectiveness of this policy appears more significant in urban areas with adequate access to services and strong social support, while in remote areas or those with strong traditional norms, this policy has less impact. Therefore, to achieve equitable effectiveness, this policy needs to be accompanied by comprehensive program support, such as increased access to counseling and reproductive health services, as well as intensive socialization by involving community leaders and traditional leaders. These additional measures can strengthen the policy and expand its impact across all levels

of society. By doing so, the Certificate of Readiness for Marriage policy can be more effective in reducing early marriage rates and creating wider awareness of the importance of marriage readiness.

### **The Effect of the Ready-to-Marry Certificate Policy on Reducing Early Marriage Rates**

The Ready to Marry Certificate policy has had a significant impact on reducing the rate of early marriage in some areas. One of the main objectives of this policy is to prepare prospective brides and grooms mentally, emotionally and physically through special requirements such as pre-marital counseling and health checks (Lubis & Muktarruddin, 2023). Based on data collected after the implementation of the policy, there was a decrease in the number of marriage dispensation applications, which had previously been increasing every year. This positive impact shows that younger brides and grooms are now considering their readiness before marriage, and the strict requirements in the policy have succeeded in changing people's views on the importance of marriage readiness. However, the effectiveness of this policy does not only come from the requirements applied, but also the support and socialization from various related parties.

Previous research supports the policy of Surat Keterangan Siap Nikah (pre-marital certificate) as an effective tool to reduce early marriage, especially in urban areas. According to Aini et al. (2024) This policy has been quite successful in encouraging young couples to postpone marriage after participating in pre-marital counseling and health check-up programs. Through the program, prospective brides and grooms better understand the physical and psychological risks of early marriage, which influences their decision to better consider their readiness before marriage (Muslifah & Busriyanti, 2024). The findings support the view that counseling as a requirement in this policy contributes significantly to shaping mindsets related to marriage readiness, especially in urban areas where there is better access to such services.

On the other hand, some research suggests that the effectiveness of these policies differs in rural areas, where social norms favor early marriage. Febriyani & Mesra (2024) found that although this policy reduced the number of marriage dispensation applications nationally, early marriage in some rural areas remained high. This is because people in rural areas still consider early marriage to be an accepted and even desirable part of tradition. The counseling and health check requirements have not been able to significantly change these traditional views, so cultural and social norms are still an obstacle to the implementation of this policy in areas with strong norms. Meanwhile, Mustahal (2023) highlighted the limitations of this policy in remote areas with limited access to services. In these areas, prospective brides and grooms often find it difficult to obtain the required counseling and health check-up services. This leads to some couples opting for customary marriages without going through official procedures, which ultimately go unrecorded in early marriage statistics. Based on these findings, the study recommends a more adaptive policy approach, especially in areas that face socio-cultural challenges and service access constraints. In addition, the importance of supporting community and religious leaders in socializing the policy on an ongoing basis to broaden acceptance in the community, especially in areas that are more open to change.

The effect of the Certificate of Readiness to Marry policy on reducing early marriage is quite visible overall, but its success depends on the social, cultural and service access context in each region. The policy was successful in reducing early marriage rates in areas with good access to counseling and health services and strong social support. However, in areas with limited access and social norms that support early marriage, the policy is less effective. Therefore, in order for this policy to have a broader and more equitable impact, a more flexible and adaptive approach is needed, such as improving access to services in remote areas and continuous socialization involving community and religious leaders.

## **Challenges in Policy Implementation and Efforts to Strengthen the Certificate of Marriage Ready Program**

The challenges in implementing the Ready to Marry Certificate policy are not only related to regulations and technical implementation, but also touch on complex social and cultural aspects in various regions. Although the policy aims to reduce the number of early marriages, its implementation is often hampered by strong social norms. Some parts of Indonesia, particularly rural areas and areas with close-knit communities, still maintain the traditional view that early marriage is part of a custom that must be respected. Raden et al. (2021) explained that people in certain areas consider early marriage as a way to maintain family honor and avoid behavior that is considered not in accordance with local norms. With this view, the acceptance of the Certificate of Ready to Marry policy is a challenge, as it is considered contrary to local cultural values.

Some researchers offer alternative approaches in overcoming policy implementation challenges by involving community leaders and religious leaders (Anwar et al., 2024; Rahmadani et al., 2024). In communities with strong traditional social norms, people pay more attention to the guidance of respected community leaders. The results of their study show that socialization through these figures helps people be more open to the benefits of delaying marriage to a mature age. Religious leaders who support this policy, for example, are able to provide the perspective that mental and physical readiness in marriage is much more important than simply carrying out tradition. This approach through religious and community leaders made the policy more acceptable, as people tended to follow advice that aligned with their local values. In addition (Widiyawati et al., 2024) suggested that this policy be complemented with ongoing assistance for young couples, so that their preparation does not stop at the counseling stage. According to them, even though prospective brides and grooms have attended counseling, without ongoing assistance, they will still face difficulties in married life, especially young couples. This support can include access to reproductive health services and financial education programs that are beneficial for family life readiness. Their findings underscore the importance of adding more holistic support programs to complement the Certificate of Marriage Ready policy.

Implementation of this policy requires a more adaptive and participatory approach. In this regard, training for pre-marital counseling officers is also important so that they are able to provide services that are appropriate to the social context and local needs. For example, this training could include skills to communicate with prospective brides and grooms who come from different cultural backgrounds, so that pre-marital counseling is not just an administrative requirement, but is also able to touch on the psychological and cultural aspects faced by prospective brides and grooms. This effort needs to be supported by an ongoing socialization program involving the government, religious leaders and community leaders so that the message of this policy can be well received by the community. By strengthening the cooperation of various parties and developing a more adaptive program, the challenges in implementing the Certificate of Marriage Ready policy can be overcome, so that this policy can function optimally to reduce the rate of early marriage in various regions in Indonesia.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that the Sertifikat Siap Nikah policy is effective in reducing the rate of early marriage in West Kotawaringin District by improving the readiness of prospective brides through pre-marital counseling and health checks. However, implementation still faces challenges, particularly in areas with strong cultural norms supporting early marriage and in areas with minimal access to services. The implications of these findings highlight the importance of adaptive policy approaches, involving community leaders and local stakeholders, and expanding the scope of support programs to achieve long-term results. Future research should explore the effectiveness of this policy in more diverse socio-cultural contexts and examine the long-term impact of this policy on marriage quality, as well as explore innovative methods such as online counseling to reach remote areas.

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