



The Relevance of Islamic Pre-Marital Counseling Da'wah to Gender Equality in Households in Mandailing Natal

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ABSTRACT

This research stems from concerns over the high divorce rate in Mandailing Natal Regency, particularly in the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) Panyabungan, where one of the main triggers is the persistence of patriarchal culture, gender role imbalance, and injustice within marital relations. In accordance with the Regulation of the Minister of Religious Affairs, PP APRI, and Circular Letter of the Director General of Islamic Community Guidance, Ministry of Religious Affairs, Number 02 of 2024, Pre-Marital Guidance is required to incorporate Islamic counseling as an effort to prevent and reduce divorce rates in Mandailing Natal.

The purpose of this study is to examine the actualization of da'wah through Islamic pre-marital counseling and how gender equality values are instilled by counselors for prospective brides and grooms at KUA Panyabungan. This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design, utilizing in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis as methods of data collection. The research subjects include KUA counselors, prospective brides and grooms, and married couples.

The findings of this study indicate that Islamic Pre-Marital Counseling serves as one of the da'wah methods employed by KUA Panyabungan counselors, specifically through mau'izhah hasanah (good counsel). The material conveyed implicitly integrates gender equality values and emphasizes the principles of rahmah (compassion), musawah (equality), and 'adl (justice). Counselors expect this process to foster greater awareness among prospective couples, helping them to avoid discriminatory practices, build more egalitarian households, and ultimately prevent divorce.

Introduction

Marriage is essentially the union of a man and a woman, within which both undergo the process of young adult development. The sustainability of the marital bond lies in a strong foundation and roots, which are closely related to both physical and emotional readiness. However, many marriages end in divorce, with the primary causes being disharmony between spouses, gender inequality, imbalance in relationships, domination by one party, and patriarchy.

In Mandailing Natal Regency, particularly in the Panyabungan Office of Religious Affairs (KUA), there is a deep concern regarding the increasing number of divorce cases. According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), the number of divorces has fluctuated from year to year. In 2020, there were 242 cases, which rose to 488 cases in 2021 and further increased to 527 cases in 2022. Although the numbers decreased to 486 cases in 2023 and 411 cases in 2024, these figures still indicate a serious issue in family resilience

(BPS, 2020–2024). The dominant causes of divorce include differences in life perspectives, financial management conflicts, and gender role imbalances between husbands and wives. This condition highlights fundamental problems in household relationships related to gender equality issues

Literature Review

Furthermore, the rising divorce trend in Mandailing Natal is also associated with prolonged interpersonal conflicts, economic challenges, and domestic violence. BPS data for 2022 and 2023 show that disputes and quarrels were the leading causes of divorce, followed by abandonment, violence, and economic problems. The complexity of these issues reflects ongoing inequality and gender injustice, with traditional role divisions remaining a central issue within families (Chrisna Wijaya, 2017). Therefore, da'wah through Islamic pre-marital counseling becomes crucial in instilling an understanding of fair and balanced gender relations.

This research is therefore important to examine the collaboration between da'wah and pre-marital counseling, incorporating gender equality content into counseling materials. Such an effort is seen as a strategy for KUA counselors to reduce risks and dynamics in marriage that may lead to divorce. Moreover, this study seeks to explore how pre-marital counseling can shift the mindset of spouses regarding relational patterns within marriage, as well as how Islamic counseling can provide positive impacts in addressing and preventing divorce within households.

Research on pre-marital counseling has previously been examined from various perspectives, such as mental, financial, and spiritual readiness (Amalia Juniarily et al., 2024). Pre-marital counseling is regarded as a systematic preparation for married life, emphasizing the roles, rights, and responsibilities of both husband and wife (Muallifah et al., 2023), serving as a preventive effort to avoid household conflict (Widodo & Manara, 2024), as an information and educational service prior to marriage (Fasira et al., 2024), and as a spiritual strengthening effort within Islamic teachings (Sutoyo et al., 2023).

Previous studies also emphasize the importance of this issue. For instance, Putri Neira Ummi Haqqun (2022) found that although pre-marital counseling has been conducted in accordance with procedures, the materials delivered still lack focus on real issues of gender equality, such as women's double burden. This indicates the need to strengthen the quality of da'wah in pre-marital guidance to be more responsive to actual societal issues. Galuh Candra Kirana (2023) highlights how prospective couples

understand the principle of partnership in marriage, including equal division of domestic and public roles, as well as the family functions carried out on an equal basis. The findings show that face-to-face pre-marital counseling with gender equality content increases participants' understanding of the importance of cooperation between husband and wife. Participants realized that both men and women have equal potential, that household responsibilities are shared, and that mutual support is crucial in fulfilling family functions. Similarly, Haqqun (2023) emphasizes that although pre-marital counseling at KUA was delivered in line with procedures, weaknesses remain in addressing gender equality content. Many materials still fail to respond to real community issues, such as women's disproportionate double burden, and the materials have not fully aligned with the "Pondasi Keluarga Sakinah" (Foundation of a Harmonious Family) book, particularly regarding justice in spousal roles and responsibilities.

Nurhasanah Bachtiar (Bakhtiar et al., 2019), in her study on gender content in pre-marital counseling conducted by BP4 (Marriage Advisory, Development, and Preservation Agency) in Pekanbaru, found that the counseling did not adequately accommodate gender perspectives. The guidance materials and delivery methods lacked explicit discussions on gender equality, both theoretically and practically.

From the review of previous studies, the distinction of this research lies in its main focus: examining the relevance and interrelation between da'wah and Islamic pre-marital counseling as an effort to prevent divorce, while incorporating gender-related content within it. The study also elaborates on the relationship between da'wah as an effort to invite and guide individuals toward goodness, and Islamic counseling, which prioritizes personal, in-depth, and face-to-face spiritual guidance between KUA and prospective couples. The novelty of this research lies in the close integration between da'wah and Islamic counseling, uniting them as an effort to instill a mindset and preventive strategy for achieving gender equality and educating couples in managing a harmonious marriage in line with Islamic teachings. This approach can potentially transform the deeply rooted patriarchal culture within the Mandailing Natal community.

Gender equality within households is a fundamental principle in creating healthy, fair, and harmonious relationships between husband and wife. In this context, the Equality Theory developed by Fatima Mernissi (Afif et al., 2021) provides a relevant theoretical foundation. When applied in households, this theory highlights the

importance of fair distribution of roles and responsibilities between spouses. Gender equality does not mean absolute sameness in all aspects, but rather emphasizes justice, whereby household workloads, domestic responsibilities, childcare, and decision-making are shared proportionally according to abilities and mutual agreements. If the wife takes care of the household and children, the husband must also contribute equally, whether through emotional support, active involvement in childcare, or other household tasks. When one spouse feels undervalued or burdened disproportionately, this imbalance can disrupt marital harmony (Januastasya Audina, 2022).

Thus, the application of equality theory in family life strongly supports gender equality values. It fosters relationships built on mutual respect, encourages open communication, and nurtures a sense of shared responsibility. In a just and equitable family environment, both men and women have equal opportunities to grow, actively participate in social life, and establish emotionally and socially resilient families. Therefore, equality theory serves as an important reference in understanding and strengthening gender equality practices within contemporary household life (Kusmanto, 2018).

Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design, aiming to explore the phenomenon more comprehensively (Sugiyono, 2013), particularly regarding the relevance between da'wah and Islamic pre-marital counseling as well as the integration of gender perspectives carried out by KUA Panyabungan. Primary data in this research were collected from documents and marriage records available at the KUA, the "Sakinah" book published by the Ministry of Religious Affairs as a guideline, and other relevant documents contributing to the study. In-depth interviews were conducted with counselors responsible for Islamic pre-marital counseling, prospective brides and grooms enrolled in the counseling program, as well as KUA staff and counselors. Secondary data were obtained from journals and studies related to da'wah, Islamic pre-marital counseling, and other references concerning gender studies.

Data analysis was carried out systematically by identifying, evaluating, and interpreting information, interviews, and other sources. Data related to Islamic pre-marital counseling, da'wah, and gender perspectives were analyzed to generate findings that reflect the relevance of da'wah, Islamic pre-marital counseling, and gender integration within the context of KUA Panyabungan.

Results

Dynamics of Islamic Pre-Marital Counseling at KUA Mandailing Natal

Pre-marital counseling activities were initiated by the government under the Regulation of the Directorate General of Islamic Community Guidance No. PJ.II/542/2013 (Dirjen Bimas Islam, 2017), followed by a circular issued by the Central Advisory, Development, and Preservation of Marriage Agency (BP4) No.059/13-P/BP4/XII/2014 dated December 16, 2014. This regulation mandated the implementation of pre-marital counseling through the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Pre-marital guidance is deemed essential, particularly for couples preparing for marriage, as it provides an understanding of the roles of husband and wife within the household to avoid gender-related conflicts. Generally, the purpose of pre-marital guidance is to provide assistance and comprehension regarding what is required to establish a family (Mahmudin, 2016).

Pre-marital counseling serves as a preparatory activity for prospective brides and grooms, aiming to provide skills, awareness, and understanding of family life in order to create an ideal household that is *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah*. Furthermore, the envisioned household within Islamic counseling emphasizes a balance between spiritual and material fulfillment between husband and wife, while embodying piety, noble character, and the practice of Islamic teachings (Dirjen Bimas Islam, 2017).

Pre-marital counseling has been made mandatory through the Regulation of the Minister of Religious Affairs No. 20 of 2019, which requires the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) to provide guidance to prospective couples. The purpose of Islamic counseling is to deliver a comprehensive understanding of marriage to couples who have already set their wedding date, typically conducted one week prior to the marriage contract. During this program, KUA usually provides material to help couples understand spousal roles, the meaning and objectives of marriage, and other topics related to family life (Cahaya, 2023).

The Panyabungan Subdistrict KUA conducts pre-marital counseling every Thursday, four times a month. Each session is attended by different participants; for instance, on June 20, 2025, there were 30 participants, on June 26 there were 10 participants, and on July 3 there were 16 participants. The content delivered by counselors varies from session to session. Methods include lectures, discussions, question-and-answer sessions, and case studies.

The implementation of Islamic pre-marital counseling at the KUA office involves counselors delivering materials related to the fundamentals of marital preparation. Counselors consider the sessions to be optimal, significantly enhancing participants'

knowledge. Moreover, participants show enthusiasm and remain conducive throughout the sessions, actively engaging in discussions and posing questions. The gender-related content conveyed by counselors has been incorporated effectively, although the terminology is often simplified to ensure accessibility for participants.

However, field findings indicate that implementation is not yet fully optimal. Limited time and the use of overly academic or theoretical terms posed difficulties for participants with lower educational backgrounds (Interview with Ibu Siti Khadijah, 2025). Additionally, the procedures did not fully align with the standards set by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia. One notable finding was that counselors did not always refer to official guidelines, such as the “Pondasi Keluarga Sakinah” (Foundation of a Harmonious Family) book published by the Directorate of KUA Development and Harmonious Families. This indicates discrepancies between the delivered material and national standards.

A particularly striking situation occurred in the second week of research, when a counselor abruptly left the session for urgent reasons and did not return until it ended. For approximately 10 minutes, the session was continued by a KUA staff member who was not a certified counselor. This incident highlighted a lack of preparedness and professionalism in carrying out duties, particularly within the context of da'wah and education concerning marital readiness.

The sequencing of topics was also found to be unsystematic. In one session, for example, the counselor abruptly shifted from discussing the marriage contract to spousal relations without proper introduction or transition. This disrupted participants' understanding and undermined the logical flow of marital education.

Furthermore, the absence of modules, reading materials, or printed and digital resources (such as PowerPoint presentations) was another weakness. Participants only received oral explanations without visual or written materials to review afterward. Such resources are crucial for reinforcing comprehension and leaving a lasting impression. The lack of supporting materials contributed to the perception among some participants that the sessions were merely a formality to fulfill administrative requirements, rather than a substantive effort to build a *sakinah* family.

Gender Content in Islamic Pre-Marital Counseling in Mandailing Natal

The delivery of gender equality content in Islamic pre-marital counseling at KUA Panyabungan demonstrated significant effectiveness in increasing participants' understanding of spousal roles within the household. The interactive approach, which combined lectures, discussions, and case studies, allowed participants to engage actively.

Nonetheless, challenges persisted in terms of diverse participant reception. Not all couples responded enthusiastically, particularly those from strong patriarchal cultural backgrounds. Some participants remained passive and continued to hold views that household matters are entirely the wife's responsibility (Interview with Counselors and Participants, 2025).

The choice of terminology played an important role in delivering the material. Counselors deliberately used the term "gender justice" instead of "gender equality" to avoid the perception that the latter was too sensitive. This strategy was considered successful in making participants more receptive to new values. However, this semantic approach raises questions about its long-term effectiveness. While the softer terminology reduced initial resistance, the full meaning and substance of equality were not always conveyed, creating potential ambiguities.

Positive responses were observed among younger participants, who acknowledged that the sessions broadened their perspectives on building equal households. One participant stated that the counseling opened their eyes to the importance of communication and cooperation, beyond traditional concerns such as who cooks or who works. Such responses illustrate that the material successfully fostered new awareness of the flexible nature of spousal roles, which had previously been viewed rigidly and one-sidedly (Interview with Prospective Couple, 2025).

Nevertheless, challenges remain in addressing contemporary concepts such as "gender equality." The term is often avoided due to its perceived association with Western discourse and potential to trigger cultural resistance. For this reason, counselors prefer to use "gender justice," emphasizing the balance of rights and obligations consistent with Islamic values. This strategy aligns with the principle of da'wah bil hikmah, though it leaves open questions about terminology in contemporary Islamic discourse (Interview with Siti Fatimah & Zulfikar Nasution, 2025).

Gender Equality Content in the Qur'an

Values are qualities that are essential and beneficial to humanity. Gender equality values are clearly articulated in the Qur'an. One of these is the role of men and women as khalifah (stewards) on earth, as Allah created humankind with the purpose of serving as khalifah. This is confirmed in Surah al-An'am: 165, which states:

وَهُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَكُمْ خَلَائِفَ الْأَرْضِ وَرَفَعَ بَعْضَكُمْ فَوْقَ بَعْضٍ دَرَجَاتٍ لِيَبْلُوكُمْ فِي مَا آتَاكُمْ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ سَرِيعُ الْعِقَابِ وَإِنَّهُ لَعَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿١٦٥﴾

Meaning: "And it is He who has made you successors (khalifah) upon the earth and has raised some of you above others in degrees, that He may test you through what He has given you. Indeed,

your Lord is swift in punishment; yet indeed, He is Forgiving and Merciful.” (Qur’an, Surah al-An’am: 165).

The term khalifah in this verse does not refer to any specific gender or ethnic group. Both men and women hold the same position as khalifah, each responsible for fulfilling their duties as stewards on earth, just as they are equally accountable as servants of God. Men and Women as Servants of God One of the purposes of human creation is to worship God, as stated in the Qur’an, Surah al-Dharyat: 56, which reads as follows:

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ

Meaning: “And I did not create the jinn and humankind except to worship Me.” (Qur’an, Surah al-Dharyat: 56).

In their capacity as servants of God, there is no distinction between men and women regarding who performs more acts of worship; those who engage in greater devotion will receive greater rewards, regardless of gender. Both men and women possess the same potential and opportunity to become ideal servants. In the Qur’an, the term “ideal servant” is often referred to as **muttaqūn** (those who are God-conscious). To attain the status of **muttaqūn**, there is no differentiation based on gender, ethnicity, or a particular group. Men and women alike have equal opportunities to achieve excellence. As human beings, the rights of men and women to attain such achievements are equal, as evidenced in the following verse, which means:

فَاسْتَجَابَ لَهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ أَنِّي لَا أَضِيعُ عَمَلَ عَامِلٍ مِّنْكُمْ مِّمَّنْ ذَكَرَ أَوْ أُتِيَ بَعْضُكُم مِّنْ بَعْضٍ فَالَّذِينَ هَاجَرُوا وَأُخْرِجُوا مِنْ دِيَارِهِمْ وَأُودُوا فِي سَبِيلِي وَقَاتَلُوا وَقُتِلُوا لَأُكَفِّرَنَّ عَنْهُمْ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ وَلَأُدْخِلَنَّهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ ثَوَابًا مِّنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ عِنْدَهُ حُسْنُ الثَّوَابِ ﴿١٩٥﴾

Meaning: "So their Lord answered them, saying: ‘Indeed, I do not allow the deeds of any doer among you to be lost, whether male or female; you are of one another. So those who emigrated, who were driven out from their homes, who suffered harm in My cause, who fought, and who were slain—surely I will remove from them their misdeeds, and surely I will admit them into gardens beneath which rivers flow, as a reward from Allah. And with Allah is the best reward.’”

This verse implies the concept of ideal gender equality and affirms that individual achievements—whether in the spiritual domain or in professional endeavors—are not monopolized by one gender alone. Both men and women have the opportunity to attain optimal accomplishments. However, in social reality, this ideal concept requires gradual stages of introduction and dissemination, as various challenges remain—particularly cultural barriers that are difficult to resolve (U. Hasanah & Hum, 2018).

Discussion

The Relevance of Da'wah with Islamic Premarital Counseling

Da'wah is an activity aimed at conveying the teachings of Islam to individuals or groups in a wise and thoughtful manner. In the context of modern life, da'wah is not limited to spiritual aspects but also encompasses social, cultural, and educational dimensions. Da'wah plays an important role in shaping a virtuous society, including in building a harmonious household based on Islamic values. In premarital counseling, da'wah serves as a medium to provide deep understanding of the responsibilities, rights, and obligations of spouses (U. Hasanah & Hum, 2019). Islamic premarital counseling aims to prepare individuals physically, mentally, emotionally, and intellectually. Its primary objective is to prepare prospective couples with a stronger comprehension of their rights and obligations.

Da'wah has a strong relevance in Islamic premarital counseling because it becomes a medium for delivering values of gender equality and the importance of mutual roles in the household. Through da'wah, couples can understand that marriage is not only about fulfilling emotional and physical needs, but also about building a fair and supportive partnership. Da'wah also helps couples develop effective communication skills, enabling them to resolve conflicts constructively (U. Hasanah, 2018).

The implementation of Islamic premarital counseling at the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) in Panyabungan essentially represents a form of contextual da'wah tailored to the needs of prospective couples as mad'u. Religious counselors act as da'i, delivering values of gender equality through the mau'izhah hasanah approach, as encouraged in QS. An-Nahl:125, which emphasizes wisdom and heartfelt advice. Materials such as fairness in spousal roles, cooperation, and compassion are framed within Islamic narratives of rahmah (compassion), musawah (equality), and 'adl (justice). Based on interviews, this counseling is not merely a formal education but also a form of da'wah that instills spiritual values in the family context.

In practice, da'wah methods in premarital counseling are not limited to one-way lectures but also involve active discussions that emphasize two-way communication between da'i and mad'u. This creates a participatory space where participants can ask questions, express their views, and seek clarification in a friendly and reasoned manner. Such an approach proves that premarital counseling as a medium of da'wah can create a dialogical and educational space relevant to household realities.

However, time limitations and short counseling durations pose challenges in delivering in-depth material. Counselors often have to condense complex material into brief

sessions. Additionally, not all participants are equally prepared to receive the material, especially those still strongly bound to patriarchal values. This demonstrates that the effectiveness of the mau'izhah hasanah method is highly influenced by the context of the audience and the time allocated. Nevertheless, the effects of da'wah in premarital counseling are evident in participants' attitudinal changes. Many acknowledged a deeper understanding of the importance of cooperation and mutual respect in marriage after attending the counseling. This shows that da'wah through premarital counseling has had a positive impact on building families characterized by sakinah, mawaddah, and rahmah, while also serving as a preventive measure against divorce. At the same time, it highlights challenges in reaching all participants thoroughly.

The mau'izhah hasanah method, which characterizes da'wah in premarital counseling, has proven effective in touching the emotional and spiritual aspects of participants. The use of polite language, non-judgmental approaches, face-to-face counseling, and real-life examples make the material more relatable. Lectures framed with compassion and Islamic reflection encourage participants to contemplate their roles in family life. This makes da'wah more than mere advice; it becomes both spiritual and practical preparation guiding couples in building healthy household relationships.

Nevertheless, da'wah through mau'izhah hasanah as a form of Islamic counseling still requires evaluation to reach participants with varying educational and intellectual backgrounds. Without adjustment, this method risks being perceived as too normative or failing to leave a lasting impression. Therefore, a combination of methods is needed, not only persuasive but also participatory and reflective.

The researcher concludes that premarital counseling at the KUA in Panyabungan demonstrates the strong relevance of da'wah in shaping families founded on gender equality. This da'wah is carried out through six elements: (1) religious counselors as da'i, (2) prospective couples as mad'u, (3) da'wah materials consisting of values of fairness and reciprocity, (4) da'wah methods primarily in the form of mau'izhah hasanah, (5) da'wah media in the form of premarital counseling at the KUA Panyabungan, and (6) atsar (impact) in the form of harmonious families characterized by sakinah. Although challenges remain in terms of time and participants' receptivity, contextual and wise da'wah continues to serve as a strategic approach to addressing marital relations and preventing household conflicts in the modern era.

The Urgency of Gender Content in Addressing Patriarchal Culture in Mandailing Natal

Marriage in Islam is not merely a formal bond but also a commitment to establishing a family of *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah*. However, the reality shows that many Muslim households still face gender inequality, where the roles of husbands and wives are often restricted by traditional stereotypes that conflict with the principle of justice in Islam. Premarital Islamic counseling, as a form of da'wah, should serve as a strategic moment to instill understanding about just gender relations within the household. Unfortunately, premarital counseling materials often still focus on wives' obligations without emphasizing husbands' responsibilities in a balanced way, or even overlooking discussions on gender equality.

Marriage guidance with gender inclusivity emphasizes the importance of fair and balanced relations between husband and wife, both in domestic and social spheres. One of the main points is the division of household responsibilities, where domestic work is not solely assigned to wives but is instead a shared responsibility with husbands. In decision-making, gender equality underscores equal involvement of both parties, especially in crucial matters such as financial management, children's education, and career planning. Furthermore, equality ensures equal access and participation in education, employment, and social engagement, enabling couples to support each other's overall well-being. Gender-inclusive marriage guidance must therefore provide education and awareness about rights and obligations of both partners to create a healthy and harmonious relationship. In social roles, gender equality encourages both husband and wife to contribute actively to society without restrictions based on gender. Importantly, such guidance must also consider legal frameworks and policies that support equality, including protection against domestic violence and access to justice.

Through premarital counseling, da'wah can be directed to provide deep understanding of the rights and responsibilities of spouses, as well as the principles of fairness and cooperation taught in Islam. This is especially important given the many misconceptions about gender roles rooted more in patriarchal culture than in authentic Islamic values. This is particularly relevant in Mandailing Natal, where the majority of the population belongs to the Mandailing Batak ethnic group, which strongly upholds patriarchal traditions. Among the Batak, especially the Mandailing in North Sumatra, men are considered "kings" whose position is elevated above women. This cultural view often causes household conflicts, as patriarchy regards women as secondary to men (Amalia Juniarily et al., 2024). However, Islam itself teaches equality between men and women in dignity and moral responsibility, despite differences in natural roles. In this context,

premarital counseling becomes a relevant da'wah space to correct biased views, prevent relational imbalances, and foster awareness that a harmonious household can only be built on mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation without any party feeling dominant. Thus, da'wah in premarital counseling is not only a religious tool but also a social transformation instrument toward gender-just families.

Gender equality does not imply identical roles in every aspect but emphasizes fairness—meaning that domestic responsibilities, childcare, and decision-making must be carried out proportionally, according to capability and mutual agreement. For instance, if a wife manages household tasks and childcare, the husband must also contribute equally, whether through emotional support, involvement in parenting, or household chores. When one spouse feels unappreciated or burdened with excessive responsibilities, this imbalance can undermine household harmony (Audina, 2022).

Conclusion

The implementation of Islamic premarital counseling at KUA Panyabungan essentially represents a form of contextual da'wah that aligns with the needs of prospective brides and grooms as the mad'u (recipients). Religious counselors, serving as da'i, convey the values of gender equality through the approach of mau'izhah hasanah, as prescribed in QS. An-Nahl verse 125, emphasizing wisdom and heartfelt counsel. The delivery of materials such as fairness in spousal roles, cooperation, and compassion is framed within an Islamic narrative that is gentle, constructive, and imbued with rahmah (compassion), musawah (equality), and 'adl (justice).

In practice, premarital counseling does not solely take the form of one-way lectures, but also involves active discussions that prioritize two-way communication between the da'i and the mad'u. This indicates that the effectiveness of the mau'izhah hasanah method is strongly influenced by the context of the recipients and the timing of its delivery. The impact of this da'wah within premarital sessions is evident in the changes observed in the attitudes of the couples-to-be. This demonstrates that da'wah through premarital counseling has yielded positive *atsar* (influence) in fostering families grounded in *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah*, while also functioning as a preventive measure against divorce. However, it also highlights challenges in reaching participants equally and profoundly.

Therefore, da'wah conveyed through premarital counseling is not only a religious instrument but also a means of social transformation toward building families that uphold fairness and gender justice.

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