



Feminist Therapy Approach as an Effort to Prevent Child Marriage at the Family Learning Center (PUSPAGA) Bantul Regency

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Abstract

Child marriage remains a challenging issue in Indonesia to this day. Childhood should be a critical period for physical, emotional and social growth before they enter adulthood. To prevent the occurrence of these cases, especially child marriage, various institutions in Indonesia provide counseling facilities or become a place to consult about family problems. One of these institutions is the Family Learning Center (PUSPAGA) which is under the auspices of the Office of Women's Empowerment, Child Protection and Family Planning (DP3AKB). This study aims to analyze the use of feminist therapy as an effort to prevent child marriage in the community of Bantul Regency, which has experienced a fairly high increase every year. This research method is qualitative with data collection through interviews. The results and discussion of this research are analyzed by the researcher and presented as follows: 1. Based on the understanding of the concept of gender by the counselor, Gender is considered as a social formation that regulates the roles and interactions between men and women through the socialization process, establishing roles, rights, obligations, and responsibilities in the context of production and reproduction. 2. Feminist Therapy in Child Marriage Prevention, Counselors who have a gender orientation and use a counseling approach create feminist counseling, an approach that emphasizes the importance of equality and efforts to achieve it.

Keywords: *Feminist Therapy; Child Marriage; Family Learning Center (PUSPAGA)*

Introduction

Child marriage is still a challenging issue in Indonesia today. Childhood should be an important period of physical, emotional and social growth before they enter adulthood. The practice of child marriage is linked to the violation of children's human rights, limiting their choices and opportunities. According to data from the *United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)*, Indonesia is ranked eighth highest in the world and second in ASEAN for the high number of child marriages. UNICEF notes that there are 1,459,000 cases of "child brides" in Indonesia, which is the center of world attention. (Jiwami, 2022).

Law No. 16/2019 on Marriage stipulates that marriage can only be carried out by a woman and a man who have reached the age of at least 19 years. However, it is unfortunate that this rule is often ignored by some people. Underage marriages, known as "Early Marriages," occur when the age of the couple getting married does not comply with the age standards set out in the law. Meanwhile, Law No. 35/2014 on the Amendment to Law No. 23/2014 on Child Protection stipulates that a person is considered a child if they are under 18 years old.

Marriage at an age that is still below a certain limit has a significant negative impact on the development of children, both biologically, psychologically, socially, and legally. (Hasibuan, 2019). Marrying before the age of 20 is not recommended because in these conditions, the reproductive organs are not fully mature, which can cause complications such as premature birth, bleeding, infection, and difficulties during the delivery process. From a psychological perspective, marriage at a relatively young age can cause household conflicts because both partners still have high egos and do not fully understand how to manage family life. One of the government's main concerns is the high maternal and infant mortality rates associated with the practice of underage marriage (Rima Wirenviona et al., 2014). (Rima Wirenviona et al., 2020).

Underage marriage in children is almost evenly distributed in every province of Indonesia, including the Special Region of Yogyakarta. Based on data obtained from the Yogyakarta Office of Women's Empowerment, Child Protection, Population Control and Family Planning (DP3AP2KB), in 2019, the percentage of women married before the age of 18 in Yogyakarta reached 3.06%, in 2020 it fell to 1.83%, and rose again in 2021 to 3.52%. In 2022, pregnancy became the main factor behind early marriage in Yogyakarta. Data from Bantul District shows that 86% of marriage dispensation applications were due to pregnancy, while in Kulonprogo it was 77%, and in Gunung Kidul it was 50%.

In addition, another reason that encourages children in Yogyakarta to marry early is the fear of sinning. Therefore, specifically, the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag) of Bantul recorded an increase in child marriage in the last 3 years. In 2019, there were 124 cases of teenagers applying for marriage dispensation. In 2020, the number increased to 157 teenagers, with details of 56 male teenagers and 101 female teenagers. In the 2021 period, there were 162 teenagers who applied for marriage dispensation, with details of 56 male teenagers and 106 female teenagers (DP3AP2DIY, 2021).

Child marriage continues to be an ongoing problem and is always a hot topic in society. Through initial observations, researchers realized that child marriage is a form of social deviation that often occurs in Bantul Regency, Yogyakarta Special Region. The problem of child marriage continues every year. According to counselors at PUSPAGA Bantul, child marriage cases remain high, as seen from the data in the following table:

Table 1. Total data of marriage dispensation applications to the Projo Tamansari Kapenawon Puspaga in 2023 (PER January - October 2023)

Gender	0-18 years	18-19 years old	Total
L	22	20	42
P	61	48	109
Total			151

(Data Source: PUSPAGA Bantul, 2023)

Based on interviews with counselors at PUSPAGA Bantul, the data source stated that the phenomenon of child marriage can be caused by several factors, such as parents who arrange marriages, weak economic conditions, low education levels, promiscuity, self-will, psychological maturity that has not been achieved, lack of direction from parents, pregnancy outside marriage, the times or globalization, customs and culture, free sexual practices, and lack of understanding of the dangers of child marriage. The impact of child marriage, as described above, certainly contributes to an increase in population growth rates and high poverty rates among most communities in Bantul Regency.

Seeing these conditions, PUSPAGA Bantul applies a child marriage prevention approach through counseling services using Feminist Therapy. Feminist Therapy is a therapeutic approach that focuses on empowering women. This approach prioritizes the principles of gender equality and women's rights. Carolyn Zerbe Enns, as described in (Sanyata, 2010) describes that feminist counseling is often referred to as feminist counseling or counseling for women. In clinical settings, it is also known as feminist psychotherapies and feminist *therapies*, although it is often used together with the terms "*feminist counseling and therapy*" or "*feminist counseling and psychotherapies*." Therefore, the term feminist counseling is often used together with feminist therapy.

This research aims to analyze the use of feminist therapy as a preventive measure against child marriage, which is increasing in the community of Bantul Regency every year. This research argues that the practice of child marriage, both officially according to state law and in a religious context, is still common in Bantul Regency. Child marriage is considered to remove the rights that children should have, especially in terms of education.

The problem of child marriage has been highlighted by the media, both print and electronic. Therefore, the government took concrete steps to prevent the problem of child marriage through the services of the PUSPAGA (Family Learning Center) Program. This program is a one-stop family service based on children's rights conducted by professionals such as psychologists or counselors. This program aims to provide solutions or assistance to parents, children and families in dealing with problems, especially in the early stages of preventing child marriage.

The PUSPAGA program targets its services to children, parents, guardians, prospective parents, and those responsible for children. The principle of PUSPAGA services is non-discriminatory and prioritizes the best interests of children and their survival. PUSPAGA services are designed to be easily accessible, with facilities that are friendly, comfortable and fun. All these principles are expected to make the PUSPAGA Program more connected to families and can be reached by various families to get help in the form of counseling, consultation, and information related to knowledge and skills in the role of parents according to children's rights. (Boreel & Meigawati, 2022).

In addition to functioning as a service unit, the PUSPAGA (Family Learning Center) Program also carries out the mandate stated in Law Number 23 of 2014 concerning "Local Government", where Women's Empowerment and Child Protection are included in non-basic service mandatory affairs in accordance with Article 11 Paragraph 2, which includes Family Quality Sub Affairs. The PUSPAGA Program operates as a Child Rights-Based Holistic

Integrative Family One Stop Service. Two types of services that must be provided by the PUSPAGA Program are Counseling/Consultation Services and Information Services. The implementation of the PUSPAGA Program services is carried out by professional Psychologists/Counselors, and if it is not possible, at least it is carried out by graduates of family-related fields, such as Bachelor of Psychology, Bachelor of Education, Bachelor of Social Welfare, Bachelor of Guidance Counseling, and so on, who have been trained (Kla.id, 2019).

The PUSPAGA program is one of the initiatives to prevent child marriage in Bantul and increase understanding of children's problems if they are not ready to start a family. Additional information from

PUSPAGA counselors noted that Bantul Regency won the Main Category at the 2023 Child Friendly Regency (KLA) Award. At the event in Semarang on Saturday (22/7/2023), Bantul district was upgraded from the Nindya category in 2022, demonstrating the district's high commitment to supporting the fulfillment of children's rights. However, the implementation of the PUSPAGA Program in Bantul is still not optimal, as seen from the relatively low number of people who consult through the program, which is due to a lack of understanding of the PUSPAGA Program as a whole.

Research Methods

This research adopts a qualitative research type with a descriptive approach. The purpose of this qualitative approach is to investigate, discover, and describe the phenomenon of child marriage in Bantul Regency which is described or explained using quantitative methods. (Noor, 2020). Descriptive qualitative research is conducted with the intention of systematically and accurately describing symptoms, facts, or events related to phenomena in a certain area (Wagiran, 2013). (Wagiran, 2013). The data sources used consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through interviews with key informants, such as counselors from PUSPAGA Bantul, who provided perspectives on the implementation of the counseling process using the Feminist Therapy approach to prevent child marriage. Meanwhile, secondary data came from previous research, including scientific articles and books.

Results and Discussion

Based on research through interviews conducted by researchers at the Family Learning Center (PUSPAGA) Bantul, information was found regarding the application of a feminist therapeutic approach as a preventive measure to prevent child marriage. This approach has been implemented by the Family Learning Center (PUSPAGA) of Bantul Regency, which is connected to the theory and practice of the feminist counseling approach. The following are the results and analysis presented by the researcher:

1. Concept of Gender Justice

Counselors understand the concept of gender and consider it as a social construction that regulates the interaction between men and women through the socialization process. Within this construction, there is an allocation of roles, rights, obligations, and responsibilities in production and reproduction functions. The term gender refers to the characteristics attached to men and women as a result of social construction and local culture. (Hotifah & Abidin, 2006). Nasaruddin Umar states that gender is a concept used to recognize differences between men and women in socio-cultural, psychological, and non-biological aspects, while sex is used to recognize differences between men and women in terms of biological anatomy. (Umar, 2010).

Based on this understanding, counselors at PUSPAGA Bantul carry out the counseling process without differentiating between prospective brides and grooms, treating both in the same way and fairly. Counselors see both brides-to-be as perfect human beings. The procedure that must be followed by both prospective brides before undergoing counseling is also the same; both are asked to fill out the registration form first. Furthermore, in the implementation of counseling, the counselor explores the readiness of the bride and groom, without differentiating between the bride and groom.

2. Feminist Therapy in Preventing Child Marriage

Gender-oriented counselors using a counseling approach created feminist counseling, an approach that emphasizes the importance of equality and efforts to achieve it. The focus of feminist counseling is more on empowering women in clinical contexts and self-development. (Sanyata, 2010).

This relates to the context of girls who face higher risks due to underage marriage, especially in terms of health for themselves and the baby that will be born.

Thus, feminist counseling can be defined as a counseling approach that aims to strengthen women and promote gender equality. It uses a variety of techniques to help women understand themselves, develop confidence, and achieve their goals. Child marriage prevention is an effort to prevent marriage under the age of 18, a complex social issue with negative physical, mental and social impacts on women.

In the concept of feminist counseling, there is the idea of community counseling. The principle of equality between the counselor and the counselee is emphasized, including the counselor's ability to see the potential of the counselee, provide information about the counseling process, use various strategies, promote the ability and independence of the counselee, encourage the expression of anger, and model positive behavior for the counselee. (Sanyata, 2010).

Based on this understanding of feminist counseling concepts, counselors at PUSPAGA Bantul are active in supporting the empowerment of children who apply for dispensation for early marriage. Concrete steps involve helping to understand women's rights, building self-confidence and self-esteem, and providing support to those who face pressure to marry underage. Jill Elaine Rader in Sigit's view supports the feminist approach as an attempt to remove injustices in psychological assessment and advance women's well-being. (Sanyata, 2010).

Conclusion

This research conducted by the Family Learning Center (PUSPAGA) Bantul focuses on preventing child marriage with a feminist therapy approach. The results of this study focus on two main aspects, namely understanding gender and the role of feminist therapy in efforts to prevent child marriage. Gender is a social construction that focuses on the relationship between individuals and their roles in society, including biological, psychological, and sociological aspects. This research also explores the role of feminism in child development, focusing on the importance of personal and professional development in the context of clinical development and personal growth to prevent child marriage.

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