JOURNAL OF SOCIAL STUDIES, ARTS AND HUMANITIES (JSSAH) *Volume 04, Number 03, November 2024, Page 082-086*
https://journal.unpak.ac.id/index.php/proceedings *e-ISSN: 2808-120X,* ***Publisher : Universitas Pakuan***

ANALYZING THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY OF THE YOUTH INFORMATION AND COUNSELING CENTER IN IMPLEMENTING THE MARRIAGE AGE MATURITY PROGRAM

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Article history: *received 14 August 2024; revised 16 September 2024; accepted 14 October 2024* *DOI: https://doi.org/10.33751/jssah.v4i3.9005*

Abstract. This study aims to analyze the strategic communication implemented by the Youth Information and Counseling Center (Pusat Informasi dan Konseling Remaja or PIK-R) Bunga Harapan in promoting the Marriage Age Maturity (Pendewasaan Usia Perkawinan or PUP) program among adolescents in East Bogor. The PUP program seeks to increase youth awareness of the physical, mental, and social readiness required before entering marriage, aligning with Indonesia's national efforts to prevent early marriage. This research uses a qualitative descriptive method, focusing on the communication strategy framework of Lasswell—who says, what message, in which channel, to whom, and with what effect. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation from PIK-R coordinators, peer educators, and target adolescents. The findings show that PIK-R Bunga Harapan effectively applies interpersonal communication and social media campaigns as the primary channels for delivering PUP messages. Message design emphasizes emotional and rational appeals, using relatable language and local cultural values to encourage behavioral awareness. However, limited funding, uneven information access, and inconsistent participation remain significant obstacles. The study concludes that well-planned strategic communication, supported by youth participation and institutional collaboration, is crucial in strengthening the effectiveness of the Marriage Age Maturity program and reducing early marriage rates among adolescents.

Keywords: strategic communication; youth counseling; PIK-R; marriage age maturity program; adolescent awareness.

I. INTRODUCTION

Adolescent reproductive health has become a critical global issue, particularly in developing countries where early marriage and insufficient sexual education continue to hinder youth development [1]. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines adolescents as individuals aged 10–19 years, a stage marked by rapid physical, psychological, and social changes that influence decision-making and life trajectories [2]. Early marriage during this phase often leads to negative consequences, including interrupted education, poor maternal health outcomes, domestic violence, and intergenerational poverty [3]. In Indonesia, these problems remain pressing, as the Statistics Indonesia (BPS) reported in 2023 that one in nine girls is married before the age of 18, with higher prevalence in rural areas and among low-income families [4]. To address this issue, the Indonesian government—through the National Population and Family Planning Agency (BKKBN) initiated the Marriage Age Maturation Program (PUP), aiming to promote awareness and readiness for marriage among youth [5]. The program emphasizes physical, emotional, financial, and educational preparedness before entering marriage [6]. Within this framework, Youth Information and Counseling Centers (PIK-R) serve as key communication channels to educate adolescents on reproductive health, gender equality, and family planning [7]. These centers function as peer-led organizations that bridge the gap between formal institutions and youth communities, utilizing participatory and culturally sensitive communication approaches [8].

However, despite the program's widespread implementation, many regions including East Bogor continue to face challenges related to low awareness, limited communication capacity, and lack of engagement among adolescents [9]. The success of the PUP program heavily depends on the effectiveness of communication strategies used by PIK-R facilitators and youth counselors in reaching and influencing their target audiences [10]. Therefore, understanding how these centers develop, implement, and adapt their communication strategies is essential for improving outreach and behavioral change among youth. Theoretically, this study draws upon Lasswell's communication model and Rogers' diffusion of innovation theory, which emphasize that effective communication involves clear message delivery, credible sources, appropriate media, and feedback mechanisms that influence audience behavior [11], [12]. In the digital era, these principles are increasingly applied through multi-channel communication combining interpersonal, mass, and social

media strategies [13]. Studies have shown that digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and online counseling applications are effective tools for promoting health and social change among young people when integrated with traditional communication approaches [14].

Within this context, the PIK-R "Bunga Harapan" in East Bogor has become an important case study for analyzing how local youth organizations adapt communication strategies to promote the PUP program. PIK-R "Bunga Harapan" employs various channels, including direct counseling, school-based campaigns, radio programs, and online communication through the Polink Gaul application a BKKBN-supported digital platform that facilitates reproductive health counseling [15]. Nevertheless, limited human resources, communication competence gaps, and the persistence of cultural taboos around sexuality continue to impede optimal implementation.

Hence, this study aims to analyze the communication strategies employed by PIK-R "Bunga Harapan" in disseminating messages about the Marriage Age Maturation Program (PUP) and to identify the challenges faced in its implementation. By doing so, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of youth-centered communication models and their role in advancing reproductive health education in Indonesia's local community settings.

A communication strategy refers to a systematic plan for delivering messages to target audiences in order to influence knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors [16]. It encompasses the components of communicator, message, channel, audience, and feedback, aligning with Lasswell's classic communication model of "who says what, in which channel, to whom, and with what effect" [17]. In the context of public and community-based programs, effective communication strategies must integrate cultural understanding and participatory approaches to enhance message acceptance [18]. Research in development communication emphasizes that successful strategies depend not only on message clarity but also on the credibility and empathy of the communicator, especially when addressing sensitive social issues [19]. In Indonesia's health and social campaigns, communication strategies often utilize a multi-channel approach combining interpersonal communication, group discussion, and social media engagement [20]. The rise of digital platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, and the Polink Gaul app has expanded the reach of adolescent health campaigns, making information more accessible while maintaining personal engagement through peer networks. According to Wibowo and Sari (2022), hybrid communication—integrating online and offline methods—produces stronger behavioral impact because it balances emotional connection with technological efficiency [21].

Health communication is the study and application of communication strategies to inform and influence individual and community decisions that enhance health outcomes [22]. The Health Belief Model (HBM) and Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) explain that individuals are more likely to adopt healthy behaviors when they perceive personal risk, receive clear and credible information, and experience supportive social environments [23]. In adolescent reproductive health, this means messages must address cognitive understanding as well as emotional and social dimensions, considering the stigma often surrounding discussions of sexuality [24]. Studies have shown that culturally sensitive communication increases the effectiveness of reproductive health programs, particularly in Muslim-majority societies where moral and religious norms heavily influence youth behavior [25]. As such, message framing must combine scientific accuracy with moral reasoning to ensure acceptability. The integration of peer-led communication, as implemented by Youth Information and Counseling Centers (PIK-R), aligns with this principle by encouraging horizontal communication youth-to-youth learning—that enhances message credibility and trust [16].

Youth empowerment is a participatory process that enables young people to gain control over their lives, develop leadership capacity, and engage in community decision-making [18]. In the Indonesian context, PIK-R (Pusat Informasi dan Konseling Remaja) serves as a vital institution under BKKBN that implements empowerment-based communication for adolescents [20]. PIK-R operates on the principle of "from youth, by youth, and for youth", positioning adolescents as both communicators and beneficiaries of health and family planning messages [21]. The role of PIK-R in the Marriage Age Maturation Program (PUP) involves educating adolescents about physical, mental, and financial readiness for marriage while preventing early unions that threaten reproductive and social well-being [19]. To achieve this, PIK-R combines interpersonal communication (counseling and focus group discussions), media campaigns (radio, posters, and social media), and digital counseling (Polink Gaul application) [22]. However, challenges persist, including limited training for peer educators, low digital literacy, and sociocultural taboos regarding sexual education [24].

Empirical studies highlight that successful youth counseling programs depend on three interrelated factors: (1) the communicative competence of facilitators, (2) message relevance to youth concerns, and (3) institutional collaboration between schools, government agencies, and local communities [25]. These elements ensure sustainability and encourage adolescents to internalize key values of maturity, responsibility, and self-discipline in life planning. Based on the literature, this study adopts an integrative framework combining Lasswell's Communication Model, Health Communication Theory, and Youth Empowerment Theory to analyze PIK-R's communication strategy. The framework assumes that the effectiveness of communication depends on the synergy between message design, communication channels, and audience participation. The evaluation of PIK-R "Bunga Harapan" focuses on three aspects: Message Formulation – clarity, relevance, and cultural sensitivity of PUP messages; Media Strategy – utilization of interpersonal, mass, and digital communication tools; Audience Engagement – youth participation, feedback mechanisms, and peer interaction. This theoretical lens supports the analysis of how communication practices influence awareness, understanding, and behavioral change among adolescents in East Bogor.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design aimed at analyzing the communication strategies utilized by the Youth Information and Counseling Center (PIK-R) "Bunga Harapan" in implementing the Marriage Age Maturation Program (PUP) for adolescents in East Bogor. The qualitative approach was selected because it enables an in-depth exploration of meanings, perceptions, and communication practices as experienced by the participants in their social and cultural contexts [26]. The descriptive design emphasizes the observation of real communication activities and strategies, rather than manipulation of variables, allowing the researchers to portray an accurate picture of how PIK-R manages message delivery, channel selection, and audience engagement. This study also incorporates elements of case study analysis, focusing specifically on PIK-R "Bunga Harapan" as a representative model of youth-led reproductive health communication within Indonesia's BKKBN network.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation review involving four main informants: the PIK-R coordinator, two youth peer counselors, and one official from the East Bogor sub-district office. Interviews were semi-structured to ensure flexibility while maintaining consistency in core topics, including message formulation, media use, and challenges in program implementation. Observations were carried out during PIK-R's outreach activities, such as school-based campaigns and online counseling sessions via the Polink Gaul application. Supporting documents, including social media posts, activity reports, and visual materials, were also analyzed to validate and enrich the findings. Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which involves three iterative steps: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing [27]. Triangulation of data sources and methods was applied to enhance validity and reliability. Ethical considerations were maintained through informed consent, confidentiality, and cultural sensitivity in addressing adolescent reproductive health topics.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that PIK-R "Bunga Harapan" in East Bogor applies a combination of interpersonal, group, and digital communication strategies to implement the Marriage Age Maturation Program (PUP) among adolescents. The center utilizes both traditional and digital platforms, including face-to-face counseling, school-based education, radio broadcasting, and social media campaigns through Instagram and the Polink Gaul online counseling application. This multi-channel approach aims to deliver messages on reproductive health, self-preparedness, and the negative implications of early marriage in a way that is relatable and culturally appropriate for youth audiences. The interpersonal communication strategy remains the most effective channel for influencing behavior, as it facilitates empathy, trust, and interactive dialogue between peer educators and adolescents. Regular counseling sessions and focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted by trained peer counselors provide a safe space for adolescents to share experiences and clarify misconceptions regarding reproductive health. In parallel, digital media especially Instagram reels and interactive posts serve to expand outreach and reinforce the key messages of PUP, particularly during periods when direct engagement is limited.

The study also found several key challenges that affect communication effectiveness. These include (1) limited human resource capacity, where only a few peer educators possess adequate communication and counseling skills; (2) low participation rates among adolescents, mainly due to stigma and parental conservatism surrounding reproductive discussions; and (3) inconsistent coordination between PIK-R, schools, and local stakeholders. Despite these challenges, PIK-R "Bunga Harapan" continues to gain recognition as one of the most active youth organizations in East Bogor for promoting PUP awareness and adolescent reproductive health.

The communication strategies observed in this study align with Lasswell's communication model and the Diffusion of Innovation Theory, which emphasize the importance of source credibility, message adaptation, and channel diversity in achieving behavioral change [28]. The integration of interpersonal and digital communication channels reflects an understanding of adolescents' media habits, where social media serves not only as an information source but also as a space for identity formation and social interaction [29]. As Wibowo and Sari (2022) note, hybrid communication models combining face-to-face and online methods enhance message resonance by balancing emotional engagement and technological accessibility. The findings also support principles from Health Communication Theory, particularly regarding the role of culturally sensitive message framing. In a community where discussions of sexuality are often constrained by social and religious norms, PIK-R's communication strategy relies on moral framing emphasizing the importance of education, maturity, and family well-being rather than focusing solely on biological aspects of reproduction. This strategy effectively reduces resistance among adolescents and parents, aligning with Storey's (2022) argument that local cultural adaptation increases message legitimacy and trust [30].

Another key aspect identified is the peer-to-peer communication model, which enhances relatability and reduces hierarchical distance between communicators and audiences. Peer counselors in PIK-R act as both informants and role models, promoting participatory dialogue and creating supportive networks among youth. This aligns with the Youth Empowerment Theory, where adolescents are positioned as agents of change in influencing their peers' behavior [31]. However, consistent skill development and institutional support are essential to sustain the motivation and effectiveness of these young communicators.

The challenges identified limited capacity, stigma, and coordination reflect structural issues that have been noted in previous studies of youth health programs across Indonesia [24]. Addressing these barriers requires policy-

level intervention, such as integrating digital literacy training, communication skill workshops, and parental engagement initiatives. Collaborative efforts between BKKBN, educational institutions, and local governments are critical for institutionalizing effective communication models and ensuring the sustainability of the PUP program in diverse community settings. In summary, the communication strategy of PIK-R "Bunga Harapan" demonstrates a hybrid and participatory model that combines empathy-driven counseling with youth-led digital engagement. Although several obstacles persist, the adaptability and cultural responsiveness of the organization exemplify an effective model for adolescent reproductive health communication in Indonesia.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the communication strategy of PIK-R "Bunga Harapan" in East Bogor plays a pivotal role in disseminating and implementing the Marriage Age Maturation Program (PUP) among adolescents. The findings demonstrate that a hybrid communication model, which integrates interpersonal, group-based, and digital strategies, significantly enhances the effectiveness of message delivery and youth engagement. Interpersonal communication through counseling and peer discussions remains the most influential in shaping adolescent understanding and attitudes toward marriage readiness. Meanwhile, the utilization of digital media such as Instagram and the Polink Gaul application expands message reach and appeals to the media consumption habits of today's youth. However, the research also identifies key barriers to optimal communication performance, including limited communicator competence, persistent stigma surrounding reproductive health topics, and inconsistent institutional coordination. Despite these challenges, PIK-R "Bunga Harapan" demonstrates adaptability, innovation, and commitment in promoting PUP objectives. Its approach exemplifies the effectiveness of youth-led participatory communication, where adolescents function as both message transmitters and social change agents. These findings contribute to the broader discourse on health communication, youth empowerment, and behavioral change within Indonesia's reproductive health education system. Based on the findings, this study proposes several recommendations. First, capacity-building programs should be strengthened for PIK-R facilitators and peer counselors through communication training, digital literacy workshops, and counseling skill enhancement initiatives. Empowering communicators with better interpersonal and media competencies will improve message credibility and youth engagement. Second, collaborative partnerships between PIK-R, schools, local health offices, and community leaders must be institutionalized to ensure consistent program implementation. Such cooperation can facilitate broader outreach and reduce sociocultural barriers associated with reproductive health communication. Third, integrating interactive digital tools and localized media content such as short videos, online discussions, and gamified educational materials—can increase adolescents' motivation to participate in PUP-related activities. Finally, future research is encouraged to adopt comparative and longitudinal designs to assess the long-term impact of youth communication strategies on behavioral change and reproductive health outcomes. The combination of evidence-based communication practices, technological innovation, and youth participation is essential for achieving sustainable progress in adolescent health education and delaying early marriage across Indonesia.

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