



Increasing Adolescent Awareness of Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights as an Effort to Prevent Early Marriage

Julietta Hutabarat*, Elisabeth Surbakti, Efendi Sianturi, Maida Pardosi

Department of Midwifery, Politeknik Kesehatan Kementerian Kesehatan Medan, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author. Email: julietta.hutabarat68@gmail.com

Abstract: This community service program aims to increase adolescents' awareness of sexual and reproductive health rights to support the prevention of early marriage at SMA Negeri 1 Kutalimbaru, Deli Serdang Regency, Indonesia. The program employed a Participatory Action Research approach using a one-group pretest–posttest design involving 50 students. The intervention consisted of health education sessions, interactive discussions, presentation media, educational pocketbooks, posters, and the establishment of Youth Ambassadors as peer educators. Data on participants' knowledge, attitudes, and practices were collected through pretest and post-test questionnaires and analyzed descriptively using frequency and percentage distributions. The results demonstrated substantial improvements across all measured variables. The proportion of participants with good knowledge increased from 16% to 90%, positive attitudes from 18% to 96%, and good practices from 14% to 92%. Following the intervention, no participants remained in the poor category for any of the assessed variables. In addition, five Youth Ambassadors were established to promote the sustainability of peer-led reproductive health education within the school. These findings suggest that a structured and participatory reproductive health education program can effectively improve adolescents' knowledge, attitudes, and practices regarding early marriage prevention while fostering sustainable peer education initiatives.

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Introduction

Early marriage, defined by UNICEF as a marriage involving an individual under 18 years of age, remains a significant social and public health concern. Globally, approximately 21% of women and 4% of men were married before age 18, representing around 650 million women and 12 million new cases annually (PLAN, 2018). Indonesia is among the ten countries with the highest absolute number of child marriages worldwide and reportedly ranks eighth globally and second in ASEAN after Cambodia (ISF-UTS & UNICEF, 2021). In 2023, 6.92% of Indonesian women aged 20–24 years had married or lived with a partner before turning 18, while applications for marriage dispensations increased from approximately 23,000 cases in 2019 to more than 64,000 in 2020 (Aiyegbusi et al., 2021). At the local level, the prevalence of early marriage in Kutalimbaru Sub-district reached 41.34% in 2020 (Batubara et al., 2022). These figures contradict Law Number 23 of 2002 concerning Child Protection, which classifies individuals under 18 as children, and BKKBN recommendations that encourage marriage at a more biologically and psychologically mature age (National Family Planning Coordinating Board, 2017; BKKBN, 2020). Therefore,



preventing early marriage requires sustained education, family support, community participation, and stronger implementation of child-protection policies.

Early marriage is a common phenomenon in Indonesian society. This phenomenon warrants attention because it can lead to complex problems. High rates of teenage pregnancy, with its detrimental health and social consequences, are a pressing issue facing low- and middle-income countries (Kapuas, 2025; Romy & Situmorang, 2025; WHO, 2014). Adolescents are more likely to experience pregnancy complications, including unsafe abortions, and are more likely to become young mothers for the second time (WHO, 2014; Ganchimeg et al., 2014; Horgan & Kenny, 2007). Their babies are also more likely to be born prematurely and die in the perinatal period. (Horgan & Kenny, 2007). Babies born to teenage mothers face a much higher risk of death than those born to women aged 20 to 24 years (WHO, 2014; Ganchimeg et al., 2014; NAOCC, 2009). They are at risk of malnutrition, low mental and physical development, inappropriate social relationships with parents, and poor education (Ganchimeg et al., 2014; Hodgkinson et al., 2014).

The negative impact of early marriage, especially on women's health, is that it can increase morbidity and mortality rates for both mothers and children. Fadlyana & Larasaty, (2016) and Hardianti & Nurwati (2020) stated that early marriage can leave children vulnerable to domestic violence, increase maternal morbidity and mortality due to complications of pregnancy and childbirth, and put children born at risk of low birth weight (LBW) and stunting. Early marriage has become a concern for the international community due to the risks associated with forced marriage, early sexual intercourse, early pregnancy, and sexually transmitted infections.

The impacts of early marriage are evident across various dimensions of life, so it is important to understand the causal factors. This is necessary to prevent an increase in the incidence of early marriage. Hasnawati (2021) and Suhendrik et al. (2021) mentioned factors related to early marriage among adolescent girls, including education, knowledge, employment, economic status, culture, free association, and mass media. Furthermore, Hermambang et al., (2021) and Indriani et al. (2023) stated that education level, income level, and religiosity are determinants of early marriage in Indonesia. Early marriage has also been shown to be influenced by parental income, parental beliefs, culture, and peers (Mayunita et al., 2023; Susilowati et al., 2024).

In addition, the main causes of child marriage can be poverty, educational and economic constraints, tradition, and religion (Hermambang et al., 2021). A study (Priyambodo, 2022) also stated that the factors causing early marriage are economic factors, low education, personal desires, free association, and customs. Early marriage hurts health, both for the mother from pregnancy to childbirth and for the baby because the reproductive organs are not yet perfect. (Ferusgel et al., 2022; Sekarayu & Nurwati, 2021) Immature reproductive organs put women who marry at an early age at risk for various diseases, such as cervical cancer, bleeding, miscarriage, increased risk of infection during pregnancy, preeclampsia, and prolonged and difficult labor. Meanwhile, the impact of early marriage on infants includes premature birth, low birth weight (LBW), congenital disabilities, and even infant death (DEWI, 2022).

Research on factors related to early marriage shows that these include knowledge, education level, and family economic status (Suhendrik et al., 2021). Community Health Centers are one of the leading providers of health efforts besides hospitals, their presence in the community not only functions as a center for health services for the community (Ferusgel et al., 2022; PITRI, 2022), but also as a community communication center and is also used as



an effort to renew (innovate) both in the field of public health and development efforts in other fields in accordance with one of the principles of community health center management, namely community empowerment, meaning that the community health center is obliged to mobilize and empower the community to play an active role in the implementation of every health effort. Therefore, the health promotion efforts of the community health center are expected to help the community implement and maintain their health.

Health promotion is essentially an effort to improve community capacity by learning from, with, and for the community so that they can help themselves. It involves community-based activities, tailored to local socio-cultural conditions, and supported by health-focused public policies. The rise in early marriage can become a population problem (Ferusgel et al., 2022). This is because early marriage has many negative impacts on various aspects of life. In terms of education, children who marry early generally stop pursuing their education. (Fiqri, 2024). Early marriage often creates a new cycle of poverty (UNICEF Global Database, 2020). In rural areas, early marriage is generally still considered commonplace, especially in communities that still practice customs or cultures that support it. In these areas, arranged marriages by parents are common, coupled with difficult geographic locations and minimal access to education, which contribute to the high prevalence of early marriage.

Research by Widyawati & Pierewan (2017) showed that rural areas had a 1.6% higher rate of early marriage than urban areas. The research was conducted by Maptukhah & Anita (2023). This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of leaflet education in increasing adolescent girls' knowledge about the risks of early marriage. The results showed a significant increase in adolescent girls' knowledge following leaflet-based education. Previous studies have shown that education significantly improves adolescents' knowledge and attitudes toward early marriage. Patimah (2024) found that e-booklet-based education produced significant changes in both variables, while Majid et al. (2025) reported that counseling and group discussions effectively increased students' understanding of the relationship between early marriage, child health problems, and stunting.

During the preliminary coordination and needs assessment at SMA Negeri 1 Kutalimbaru, the school considered early marriage and adolescent reproductive health relevant issues for its students. A baseline assessment involving 50 students showed that 68% of participants had inadequate knowledge of sexual and reproductive health rights and early marriage prevention. This school-level condition was particularly concerning because the prevalence of early marriage in Kutalimbaru District had reached 41.34% in 2020. These findings indicated a clear educational gap among students and demonstrated the need for a structured, age-appropriate intervention that combined reproductive health education, interactive discussion, educational media, and peer educator empowerment. Based on these findings, this community service program aims to strengthen adolescents' awareness of sexual and reproductive health rights through their active involvement as Early Marriage Prevention Ambassadors who provide peer education and disseminate positive messages in schools and communities.

Method

This community service program uses a participatory action research (PAR) (Lawson et al., 2015) approach with a one-group pretest-posttest design. This approach was chosen because the program actively involves school partners, principals, and youth from the planning, implementation, and evaluation stages of the Empowered Youth Ambassadors for Early Marriage Prevention. The activity was carried out at SMA Negeri 1 Kutalimbaru, Deli



Serdang Regency, North Sumatra Province. The target of the activity was teenagers at SMA Negeri 1 Kutalimbaru. In the initial stage, 50 participants were identified in collaboration with the school, and then 5 were selected as Empowered Youth Ambassadors to Prevent Early Marriage, or peer educators. This location was chosen because the proposal recorded the prevalence of early marriage in Kutalimbaru District as around 41.34% in 2020, and 68% of teenagers' knowledge was still in the inadequate category.

The activity stages include initial coordination with school partners, needs analysis through an initial survey, preparation of educational media, implementation of pretests and posttests, socialization and training on sexual and reproductive health rights and prevention of early marriage, selection and provision of Empowered Youth Ambassadors to Prevent Early Marriage, peer education mentoring, installation of IEC media, and evaluation through a posttest. The intervention media consisted of PowerPoint presentations, pocketbooks, and posters. The role of partners includes providing a venue, facilitating participants, identifying 50 potential students, and monitoring peer education activities by the partner's post-program service team. Quantitative data were collected using a questionnaire developed by the authors to assess participants' knowledge, attitudes, and practices regarding sexual and reproductive health rights in the context of early-marriage prevention. The questionnaire underwent expert review and validity and reliability testing before data collection. Scores were categorized as good ($\geq 75\%$), sufficient (56%–74.9%), or poor ($< 56\%$) based on (Arikunto, 2010). Quantitative data analysis was conducted univariately to observe the distribution of scores before and after the intervention. The success of the program was determined based on the formation of 5 Empowered Youth Ambassadors to Prevent Early Marriage, an increase in adolescent knowledge and attitudes with a target of at least 80% of participants being in the good category after the intervention, and the development of a follow-up plan for ongoing peer education in schools.

Result and Discussion

The initial phase of the activity was carried out through coordination with partners, namely the Principal of SMA Negeri 1 Kutalimbaru. At this stage, the community service team conveyed the purpose and objectives of the activity, explained the program implementation plan, and approached the principal to ensure the activity could run according to students' needs. The school responded positively to this activity because the topics of early marriage and adolescent reproductive health were considered relevant to adolescents' current conditions.



Figure 1. Coordination with the Principal of SMA Negeri 1 Kutalimbaru



Coordination was also carried out to determine the activity participants, the time and location, and the technical aspects of implementation at the school. The school played a role in facilitating student attendance, providing the venue, and supporting the smooth running of the activity. School support was a crucial factor in the success of this community service activity.

A) Community Service Implementation Process

This community service activity was held at SMA Negeri 1 Kutalimbaru, Deli Serdang Regency, North Sumatra. 50 students attended this activity. A community service team from the Medan Ministry of Health Polytechnic, Department of Midwifery, initiated this activity. The community service team, this activity was also supported by students who helped the event run smoothly, from serving as hosts and mentors to distributing questionnaires and documenting the activity. This activity aims to improve students' knowledge, attitudes, and practices regarding sexual and reproductive health rights as a means of preventing early marriage. Furthermore, this activity aims to develop "Empowered Youth to Prevent Early Marriage" Ambassadors as agents of change within the school environment. Selected ambassadors are expected to convey information to their peers, model positive behavior, and help spread the message of early marriage prevention on an ongoing basis.

Series of Community Service Activities

The activity began with technical and logistical preparations by the community service team and students. Educational materials included presentation materials, a pocketbook, pre- and post-test questionnaires, and symbolic equipment for selecting "Empowered Youth to Prevent Early Marriage" Ambassadors. Students served as emcees and helped organize the event to ensure it ran smoothly. The event was officially opened as the student representative from SMA Negeri 1 Kutalimbaru. In his remarks, he expressed his support for implementing this community service activity, as it was considered beneficial for students, especially in helping them understand the dangers of early marriage and the importance of maintaining reproductive health. After the school's remarks, the activity continued with a speech by the head of the community service team. The team head conveyed that this activity was a form of the university's concern for adolescent issues, especially to increase student awareness so they can make the right decisions regarding education, health, and the future.

Following the opening session and remarks, participants were given a pretest to assess their initial knowledge, attitudes, and practices regarding sexual and reproductive health rights and the prevention of early marriage. Next, the community service team delivered educational materials on the definition of early marriage, the factors contributing to it, the impact of early marriage on reproductive health, the psychological and social impacts, the risks to education, and the importance of adolescents' sexual and reproductive health rights. The materials were delivered communicatively and tailored to participants' ages to ensure ease of understanding. The material presented is the Concept of Adolescents and Reproductive Health; Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights of Adolescents; Definition of Early Marriage; Factors Causing Early Marriage; Impact of Early Marriage on Reproductive Health; Impact of Early Marriage on Education and the Future; Psychological and Social Impact of Early Marriage; Prevention of Early Marriage in Adolescents; Duties and responsibilities of adolescent girls in preventing early marriage.

The outreach activities were interactive. Participants were allowed to ask and answer questions and express their opinions on early marriage. The discussions were conducted in simple language relevant to teenagers' lives, making it easier for participants to connect the



material to situations that might occur in their surroundings. The atmosphere of the activities was active and conducive, as evidenced by the participants' attentiveness during the presentation and their involvement in the Discussion.



Figure 2. Material presentation activities by the service team

Evaluation and Educational Intervention

The activity was evaluated through pre- and post-tests to assess students' knowledge, attitudes, and actions. In addition to questionnaires, the evaluation also included observations of participant engagement. Participants responded positively during the counseling sessions, particularly during discussions on the impact of early marriage on education, reproductive health, and the future of adolescents. This demonstrated that the material was well received and aligned with adolescents' educational needs in the school environment.

Selection of Ambassadors for "Empowered Youth Prevent Early Marriage"

Following the outreach and evaluation activities, the "Empowered Youth to Prevent Early Marriage" Ambassadors were selected. The selection of ambassadors is a key objective of the community service program. The selected ambassadors are expected to serve as an extension of the community service team and the school in conveying the message of early marriage prevention to their peers.

Ambassador selection is based on participants' active participation during the activity, their ability to understand the material, their communication skills, and their willingness to participate in peer education activities. Selected ambassadors are given opportunities to build roles and serve as positive role models for other students. The ambassador's role is not only as a symbol of the initiative but also as an agent of change, helping create a school environment more focused on preventing early marriage.



Figure 3. Formation of Empowered Youth Ambassadors to Prevent Early Marriage

The formation of "Empowered Teenagers to Prevent Early Marriage" Ambassadors is one way to empower young people. Through this activity, students are positioned not only as recipients of information but also as active participants in disseminating health information. With the ambassadors, education on sexual and reproductive health rights is expected to continue through a peer-to-peer approach that is more relevant to young people's lives.

Impact and Follow-up

Based on the evaluation results, this community service activity demonstrated a positive impact on improving students' knowledge, attitudes, and actions regarding early



marriage prevention. This improvement was evident in the post-test results, which showed that the majority of participants were in the good category across all variables. The absence of participants in the poor category after the education session demonstrated that this activity effectively improved students' understanding. As a follow-up, the "Empowered Youth to Prevent Early Marriage" Ambassadors are expected to actively disseminate information to their peers through school activities, student organizations, and informal communication within the school environment. The school is also expected to support the program's sustainability through teachers, homeroom teachers, guidance counselors, and the Student Council (OSIS). With school support and active student involvement, this activity is expected not only to reach beyond outreach but also to become a sustainable educational movement aimed at preventing early marriage at SMA Negeri 1 Kutalimbaru.

Respondent characteristics

Table 1. Characteristics of Students of SMA Negeri 1 Kutalimbaru (n=50)

Variables	n	Percentage (%)
Age		
15 years	6	12
16 years	22	44
17 years	21	42
18 years	1	2
Gender		
Woman	33	66
Man	17	34
Amount	50	100

Table 1 shows that the community service program involved 50 students from SMA Negeri 1 Kutalimbaru. Most respondents were aged 16 years, totaling 22 students (44%), followed by 17-year-olds with 21 students (42%), 15-year-olds with 6 students (12%), and 18-year-olds with 1 student (2%). Thus, the majority of respondents were in the 16–17-year age group. Based on gender, 33 respondents (66%) were female and 17 respondents (34%) were male, indicating that female students constituted the largest proportion of participants.

Table 2. Results of Knowledge, Attitudes and Actions of Students of SMA N 1 Kutalimbaru.

Variables	Pretest		Post Test	
	n	%	n	%
Knowledge				
Good	8	16	45	90
Enough	21	42	5	10
Not enough	21	42	0	0
Attitude				
Good	9	18	48	96
Enough	20	40	2	4
Not enough	21	42	0	0
Action				
Good	7	14	46	92
Enough	19	38	4	8
Not enough	24	48	0	0
Amount	50	100%	50	100%

Table 2 shows that before the intervention, most students at SMA Negeri 1 Kutalimbaru had not yet achieved good levels of knowledge, attitudes, and actions. Only 8 students (16%) demonstrated good knowledge, 9 students (18%) showed good attitudes, and



7 students (14%) reported good actions, while the remaining respondents were classified in the sufficient or poor categories. After the intervention, the results improved substantially, with 45 students (90%) reaching the good category for knowledge, 48 students (96%) for attitudes, and 46 students (92%) for actions. No respondents remained in the poor category across all three variables. These findings indicate that the intervention effectively improved students' knowledge, attitudes, and actions related to the prevention of early marriage.

Discussion

Community service activities at SMA Negeri 1 Kutalimbaru demonstrate that education on adolescent sexual and reproductive health rights is essential for preventing early marriage. The program was designed not merely to deliver information, but to build students' awareness of the health, educational, psychological, social, and future consequences of early marriage through structured stages of exploration, counseling, evaluation, and the formation of youth ambassadors. Most participants were aged 16–17 years, a critical period of middle adolescence when individuals begin to develop self-identity, understand relationships, plan their education, and make important life decisions. Therefore, providing accurate and relevant information at this stage can help adolescents resist social pressure, correct misconceptions, and avoid viewing early marriage as a solution to personal or social problems.

Most participants were female, a group particularly vulnerable to the reproductive, educational, psychological, and social consequences of early marriage, although male involvement remains equally important because prevention requires shared responsibility. The pretest results showed that students' knowledge, attitudes, and actions related to early marriage were generally still in the sufficient and poor categories, indicating limited understanding and weak preventive tendencies. After the educational intervention, the post-test results improved substantially across all variables, with most students reaching the good category and none remaining in the poor category. These findings show that age-appropriate and interactive counseling can strengthen adolescents' understanding of early marriage, promote more supportive attitudes toward postponing marriage, and encourage preventive actions such as seeking reliable information, discussing concerns with parents or teachers, and making decisions that protect their health, education, and future.

Several research results support this service.(Fitria et al., 2024)The results of this study indicate that the prevalence of early marriage among adolescent girls in rural Indonesia is 11.9%, and education level is strongly associated with this incidence. Adolescent girls with only elementary school education have a much greater chance of experiencing early marriage than those who have completed college (AOR 448.926), as well as at the junior high school (AOR 146.171) and high school (AOR 21.355) levels. This means that the higher an adolescent girl's education, the lower her likelihood of experiencing early marriage, so education is seen as an important factor in preventing early marriage in rural Indonesia.

Study(Walinono, 2024): Research shows that peer education positively empowers vulnerable youth to prevent early marriage. Essentially, when adolescents are empowered to become educators for their peers, their knowledge, attitudes, and awareness of the dangers of early marriage increase, making messages about reproductive health and preventing risky behavior more readily accepted by vulnerable youth groups. Research result(Purwana et al., 2025) showed that early marriage education using the eBook "Teenagers and Early Marriage" had a significant effect in increasing adolescents' knowledge at MA Malaka, North Lombok. Before the intervention, most respondents were in the sufficient knowledge category, with an average score of 5.65; after the intervention, the majority were in the good knowledge category, with an average score of 7.44. The statistical test results also showed a p-value of



0.000, so the eBook was considered effective as an educational medium for preventing early marriage among adolescents. The study (Musthofa & Yati, 2023) showed that educational videos were effective in increasing adolescents' knowledge about the impact of early marriage at SMAN 1 Panggang. Before the intervention, the majority of respondents were in the sufficient knowledge category at 50%, with an average score of 11.03; after the educational video, the majority moved to the good knowledge category at 59.3%, with an average score of 11.9. The results of the statistical test also showed a significant difference ($p = 0.003$), so the educational video was considered to have a positive effect on adolescents' understanding of the risks of early marriage.

The peer education approach through Youth Ambassadors was chosen because adolescents often feel more comfortable discussing sensitive issues with peers who share similar ages, language, and social experiences. Peer educators can reduce communication barriers, correct misinformation, reinforce health messages, model responsible behavior, and encourage students to seek appropriate support. Recent studies support this approach. Peer-led reproductive health education has been shown to improve adolescents' knowledge, behavioral intentions, and access to sexual and reproductive health information and services (Lufthiani et al., 2023; Nuttall et al., 2022; Ogul & Sahin, 2024; Phiri et al., 2024). In Indonesia, GenRe Ambassadors also function as credible youth influencers who promote preventive behavior and facilitate communication on sensitive health issues (Ratnawati et al., 2024). However, the immediate pretest–post-test improvement in this program reflects the combined educational intervention rather than the Youth Ambassadors alone, as they were selected after the evaluation. Their main role is to sustain and expand peer-to-peer education, which should be assessed through follow-up evaluation.

The formation of "Empowered Teenagers to Prevent Early Marriage" Ambassadors is a crucial part of the program's sustainability. Teenage ambassadors act as peer educators, conveying information to their peers through a more accessible and accessible approach. This strategy is appropriate because teenagers are often more open with their peers than with adults. With the support of schools, guidance counselors, homeroom teachers, and the student council (OSIS), this activity has the potential to become a sustainable educational movement within the school environment. Overall, the results of this activity demonstrate that structured, communicative reproductive health education that actively involves teenagers can improve students' knowledge, attitudes, and actions in preventing early marriage.

Conclusion

This community service activity successfully increased adolescents' awareness at SMA Negeri 1 Kutalimbaru regarding sexual and reproductive health rights as an effort to prevent early marriage. Education-based interventions, interactive discussions, learning media, and the formation of "Empowered Teenagers Prevent Early Marriage" Ambassadors led to significant increases in students' knowledge (16% → 90%), attitudes (18% → 96%), and actions (14% → 92%). The active participation of adolescents in peer counseling strengthened their understanding of the risks of early marriage, the impacts on reproductive health, education, psychology, and social issues. It encouraged their readiness to make informed decisions regarding the future. The formation of adolescent ambassadors is an effective strategy for ensuring the sustainability of education and for creating a school environment that supports efforts to prevent early marriage.



Recommendation

Based on the results of this community service program, the following recommendations are proposed:

- 1) For the School Principal and Guidance Counselors
The school should formalize the Youth Ambassadors (Duta Remaja) program through an official decree or school regulation. The school should also allocate regular time for reproductive health education, peer counseling, and early marriage prevention activities to ensure program continuity.
- 2) For the Youth Ambassadors
The Youth Ambassadors should actively use the school's social media platforms to conduct digital campaigns, share accurate reproductive health information, and promote messages related to early marriage prevention among their peers. All content should be coordinated with teachers or guidance counselors to ensure its accuracy and appropriateness.
- 3) For Future Community Service Teams and the Health Sector
Future community service teams should establish sustainable collaboration with the Kutalimbaru Community Health Center (Puskesmas Kutalimbaru). This collaboration may include regular health education, medical supervision, technical assistance, referral support, and periodic evaluation of the Youth Ambassadors program.

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