



The Role of Traditional Kyai in Mitigating Early Marriage in Indonesia: An Analysis of a Social Phenomenon within the *Maṣlahah* Framework

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Abstract

Early marriage is currently a significant concern in developing countries, such as Indonesia. Attention has been directed towards the causes and effects of the high prevalence of early marriage. Various government agencies, community leaders, traditional leaders, and religious leaders have implemented efforts to prevent early marriage; however, these initiatives have not succeeded in significantly reducing its incidence. This study examines the social phenomenon of a Kyai in Lamongan Regency, East Java Province, Indonesia, who plays a pivotal role as a religious figure in the prevention of early marriage. This research adopts a qualitative methodology employing field research methods. Primary data sources were obtained from relevant agencies in Lamongan Regency, the Kyai as an actor, santri (Islamic students), parents of santri, and the broader community. Data collection was conducted through structured interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. The research data were subsequently analysed using functional structure theory and Islamic law, particularly focusing on the aspect of *maṣlahah* (public interest). The findings of this study indicate that the role of the Kyai as educators and charismatic religious figures has positively impacted the reduction of early marriage rates in Lamongan. Furthermore, the social role of the Kyai is inextricably linked to their position as figures who encourage the community to foster a conducive environment for the development of the younger generation. The strategies devised by the Kyai include the design of a curriculum that encompasses material on marriage, the provision of guidance to the guardians of Islamic boarding school students, and the organisation of religious lectures for the general public. This study presents a functional structure model that operates effectively and advocates for local governments to optimise the role and function of the Kyai in the prevention of early marriage in Indonesia.

Keywords: Early Marriage; Islamic Law; Kyai, *Maṣlahah*; Social Role.

Abstract

Pernikahan dini saat ini menjadi perhatian serius di negara berkembang seperti Indonesia. Perhatian tersebut difokuskan pada faktor penyebab dan dampak dari tingginya praktik pernikahan dini. Upaya pencegahan pernikahan dini telah banyak dilakukan oleh berbagai lintas lembaga pemerintah, tokoh masyarakat, tokoh adat, serta tokoh agama, namun belum dapat menurunkan angka pernikahan dini secara signifikan. Penelitian ini berfokus pada fenomena sosial seorang Kyai di Kabupaten Lamongan, Provinsi Jawa Timur, Indonesia, yang memerankan fungsinya sebagai figur dan tokoh agama dalam mencegah pernikahan dini. Studi ini merupakan penelitian kualitatif dengan metode penelitian lapangan. Sumber data primer diperoleh dari instansi terkait di Kabupaten Lamongan, Kyai sebagai aktor, santri, orang tua santri, dan masyarakat. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui wawancara terstruktur, observasi partisipatif, dan dokumentasi. Data penelitian kemudian dianalisis dengan menggunakan teori struktur fungsional dan hukum Islam, terutama aspek *maṣlahah*. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa peran Kyai sebagai pendidik dan tokoh agama yang karismatik memberikan dampak positif dalam menurunnya angka pernikahan dini di Lamongan. Tentunya, peran sosial Kyai ini tidak lepas dari posisinya sebagai figur yang mendorong masyarakat untuk menciptakan lingkungan yang baik bagi perkembangan generasi muda. Strategi yang dibangun oleh Kyai antara lain adalah mendesain kurikulum yang memuat materi pernikahan, memberikan pengarahan kepada wali santri, dan menyelenggarakan pengajian untuk masyarakat umum. Penelitian ini menunjukkan model struktur fungsional yang berjalan dengan baik dan mendorong pemerintah daerah untuk memaksimalkan peran dan fungsi Kyai dalam pencegahan pernikahan dini di Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: Hukum Islam; Kiai; *Maṣlahah*, Peran Sosial; Perkawinan Dini.



Introduction

Kyai in society serve as intellectuals, cultural intermediaries, and social controllers. Primarily, Kyai act as ulama, figures well-versed in Islamic teachings. As religious scholars, Kyai play a crucial role in imparting spiritual knowledge and guiding students in Islamic boarding schools. Furthermore, according to Geertz, Kyai are also referred to as cultural mediators, tasked with bridging broader traditions and local customs in Indonesia, particularly within Javanese society.¹ Additionally, Dhofier emphasises that Kyai have a social function as controllers of society.² Consequently, many individuals seek guidance from Kyai on various issues, hoping to receive blessings and prayers to aid in realising their dreams and aspirations.

When discussing Kyai, it is closely related to the term Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*). Islamic boarding school serves as a centre for the dissemination of Islamic knowledge, positioning the Kyai as a religious figure who acts as a reference for the community in matters of Islamic law. Marriage is one such issue within Islamic and social law. In fiqh studies, marriage is not merely viewed as a social contract but also as a sacred agreement (*mitsāqan ghalīzan*) that binds a man and a woman to adhere to Allah's commands. The intention of marriage is to foster love, friendship, and emotional support between spouses. This is evident in the context of Islam, as reflected in the Islamic concepts of “*sakinah*” (tranquillity), “*mawaddah*” (love), and “*rahmah*” (compassion).³ In many cultures, marriage is also regarded as a spiritual or religious act. For instance, in Islam, marriage is considered a sunnah (tradition) of the Prophet and a means of fulfilling religious obligations.⁴ In this regard, Kyai undoubtedly play a significant role in providing a robust foundation for marriage and elucidating how to achieve the objectives of marriage.

Marriage is currently the focus of numerous researchers exploring various issues and approaches. One such issue is the high rate of early marriage. This situation becomes a dilemma, as the minimum age for marriage in Indonesia is 19 years for both men and women.⁵ Several researchers argue that the increasing rate of early marriage deprives children of their rights to life, proper education, development in accordance with their age, and mental, psychological, and reproductive health.⁶ Furthermore, families often perceive early marriage as a response to the economic uncertainties faced by parents and as a means to avoid pregnancy prior to marriage.⁷ An examination of the factors contributing to early marriage reveals that they encompass cultural, religious, parental, economic, and social environmental

¹ Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960).

² Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *Tradisi Pesantren Studi Perbandingan Hidup Kyai Dan Visinya Mengenai Masa Depan Indonesia* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 2011).

³ Ismail Siti Zubaidah and Awang Mat Muhamad Zahiri, “The Concepts of Sakinah, Mawaddah and Rahmah as Foundation for Marital Happiness According to the Holy Qur’an: An Analysis Based on Ayat 21, Surah Al-Rum,” *Al-Bayan: Journal of Qur’an and Hadith Studies* 14, no. 2 (2016): 206–22, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22321969-12340039>.

⁴ Dian Apriana, Nanda Silvia, and Uwem Imoh Emmanuel, “Imbalance of Rights and Obligations of Husband and Wife in the Family,” *MILRev: Metro Islamic Law Review* 1, no. 2 (2022): 214–30, <https://doi.org/10.32332/milrev.v1i2.6210>.

⁵ Pemerintah Republik Indonesia, “Undang-Undang No. 16 Tahun 2019 Tentang Perubahan UU No. 4 Tahun 1974 Tentang Perubahan Batas Usia Perkawinan” (2019).

⁶ Anak Agung Istri Ari Atu Dewi et al., “The Role of Human Rights and Customary Law to Prevent Early Childhood Marriage in Indonesia,” *Sriwijaya Law Review*, July 19, 2022, 268–85, <https://doi.org/10.28946/slrev.Vol6.Iss2.1885.pp268-285>.

⁷ Enny Fitriahadi et al., “Strategies for Child Marriage Prevention in Indonesia: A Case Study,” *Jurnal Kesehatan Masyarakat* 21, no. 1 (July 30, 2025): 156–65, <https://doi.org/10.15294/kemas.v20i3.13732>.

influences.⁸ Therefore, to mitigate the factors leading to early marriage, various societal aspects, including families, communities, educational institutions, and the government, must play a role.

Several initiatives to prevent early marriage have been undertaken by religious authorities within the community, advocating for the postponement of marriage to safeguard the health and rights of children. Additionally, they provide insights into the objectives of Islam based on *maqāsid sharia*. Judges in religious courts also play a crucial role in navigating social, legal, and religious pressures, particularly in cases of pregnancies occurring outside of marriage.⁹ In West Nusa Tenggara, tuan guru or religious leaders significantly contribute to enhancing understanding and compliance with the law within the Sasak Rembiga community through religious studies and counselling. This role underscores the importance of integrating religious, cultural, and legal values.¹⁰ Cross-sector collaboration is essential for the effectiveness and sustainability of early marriage prevention efforts.

In Lamongan district, East Java, Indonesia, Kiai or religious leaders also contribute to reducing the incidence of early marriage. Cooperation among Islamic boarding schools, religious courts, communities, parents, and the government has led to a decrease in the number of early marriages, from 462 marriage dispensation requests in 2022 to 307 requests in 2023 and 234 requests in 2024. In this context, Kiai actively support government programmes by providing public education and pre-marital counselling, emphasising that delaying marriage aligns with Islamic principles regarding maturity and family welfare. This study aims to explore the role of Kiai within grassroots communities in combating early marriage. This role represents one of the efforts to assist the Indonesian government in reducing the high rate of early marriage. The *maṣlahah* theory is employed to analyse the role of Kiai in this research issue. The findings of this study not only enrich the field of Islamic family law with an empirical perspective rooted in the contributions of religious leaders but also provide a conceptual foundation for developing strategies to prevent early marriage in various regions of Indonesia based on *maṣlahah* values.

Method

This research employs a qualitative methodology with a field research approach. The study focuses on three key areas: the prevalence of early marriage, the implementation of early marriage prevention programmes in Lamongan Regency, and the analytical role of Kiai in Lamongan Regency in efforts to prevent early marriage, grounded in *maṣlahah* values. The primary data sources for this study consist of Kiai (religious leaders) from various Islamic boarding schools in the Lamongan area, the Population Control and Family Planning Office of Lamongan District, students from Islamic boarding schools, and the local religious affairs office. Secondary data were obtained from journal articles and the works of notable Muslim scholars such as al-Ghazali and Ibn Qudamah. Data collection methods included observation,

⁸ M. Maharani, R. Rahardiansyah, and N. Luthviatin, "Factors, Impacts, and Efforts in Preventing Early Marriage Culture on Women's Reproductive Health: Literature Review," 2024, 030021, <https://doi.org/10.1063/5.0241796>.

⁹ Asfa Widiyanto, Siti Zumrotun, and Heru Saputra, "The Prevention of Underage Marriage in Indonesia: State, Religious Authority and Human Rights," *Justicia Islamica* 21, no. 2 (October 10, 2024): 401–22, <https://doi.org/10.21154/justicia.v21i2.9771>.

¹⁰ Sainun Sainun, Hery Zarkasih, and Arif Sugitanata, "Tuan Guru and the Efforts to Prevent Early Marriage Among Sasak Tribe," *De Jure: Jurnal Hukum Dan Syar'iah* 16, no. 1 (June 21, 2024): 37–57, <https://doi.org/10.18860/j-fsh.v16i1.23742>.

structured interviews, and document analysis. The research data were subsequently analysed following the steps outlined by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana. Triangulation, as defined by Patton (1984) and cited by Ghony & Almansur, is classified into four types: (1) data triangulation, (2) researcher triangulation, (3) methodological triangulation, and (4) theoretical triangulation. This study employs the theory of *maṣlahah* to analyse the research data, assessing the extent to which Kiai contribute to mitigating early marriage.

The phenomenon of early marriage in Lamongan regency, East Java

Early marriage is currently a significant issue in Indonesia. This problem is exacerbated by various factors, including poverty, lack of education, religious beliefs, cultural pressures, and limited employment opportunities.¹¹ In Lamongan District, East Java Province, there is a notably high number of requests for marriage dispensations. However, this study has identified discrepancies between the data provided by the Religious Court and the Indonesian Population Control and Family Planning Agency. This divergence in data can be attributed to the differing minimum age limits enforced by these institutions. The Religious Court enforces a minimum age limit of 19 years for both men and women, whereas the Indonesian Population Control and Family Planning Agency imposes a minimum age limit of 21 years for both genders.¹²

This inconsistency in the application of the minimum age limit for marriage has led to variances in the reported data on early marriage within Lamongan Regency. The Lamongan Religious Court recorded an increase in the number of marriage dispensation requests from 2017 to 2022, followed by a gradual decline observed between 2022 and 2024. The increase is illustrated in Table 1.¹³

Table 1. Data on Marriage Dispensation Applications at the Lamongan Religious Court from 2017 to 2024

Year	Number of Exemption Applications Submitted
2017	69 applications
2018	55 applications
2019	116 applications
2020	426 applications
2021	419 applications
2022	426 applications
2023	307 applications
2024	234 applications

The data reveals a significant discrepancy when compared to the statistics provided by the Indonesian Directorate General of Population and Family Planning (DPPKB). In 2017, there were 962 reported cases, constituting 9.19% of the total number of marriages that year. In 2018,

¹¹ Nina Nurmila and Wiwin Windiana, "Understanding the Complexities of Child Marriage and Promoting Education to Prevent Child Marriage in Indramayu, West Java," *Ullumuna* 27, no. 2 (December 31, 2023): 823–53, <https://doi.org/10.20414/ujis.v27i2.680>.

¹² Siti Masiroh, "Data from Interviews with Religious Courts and Population and Family Planning Institutions in Lamongan Regency" (Lamongan, 2024).

¹³ Mazir, "Interview with the Clerk of the Lamongan Religious Court" (2024).

the figure remained the same at 962 cases (9.19%). In 2019, there was an increase to 1,305 cases (12.39%), followed by a decrease to 139 cases (14.18%) in 2020, and a subsequent rise to 685 cases (7.89%) in 2021.¹⁴ The findings highlighting the discrepancies between the data from the religious court and the relevant agencies in Lamongan necessitate attention and follow-up actions by the local government in collaboration with other stakeholders to ensure a high level of accuracy.

According to the Lamongan Religious Court, several factors contribute to the elevated rate of early marriage in Lamongan. These include economic reasons (approximately 1.86%), pregnancy (approximately 14.60%), and mutual affection (83.53%). Conversely, DPPKB data indicates that the predominant factors are socio-cultural issues, economic challenges, and children's incapacity to pursue higher education. Additionally, mutual love between young couples emerges as a significant factor in applications for marriage dispensation in Lamongan Regency.¹⁵ The aforementioned high rates and their underlying causes are undoubtedly concerning for the local government, which must devise strategies to educate the community regarding the negative impacts of early marriage. A crucial element within the community is the presence of religious leaders (Kyai). These leaders, along with Islamic educational institutions or Islamic boarding schools, are assisting the Lamongan local government in its efforts to mitigate the rate of early marriage.

At least two Islamic boarding schools are actively participating in initiatives to prevent early marriage, including the Darun Najah Islamic Boarding School in Sukorame Village, Sukorame Subdistrict, Lamongan Regency, managed by KH Suparno Ali Basyir, and the Al-Munawaroh Islamic Boarding School, located on Jalan Diponegoro, Brondong Subdistrict, Lamongan Regency, managed by KH Ahmad Hasan Al Banna.

In this context, the Kyai actively provide religious and moral education to the community through various platforms, such as regular recitations, Friday sermons, and activities at Islamic boarding schools. They emphasise that the current prevalence of early marriage contradicts the objectives of Islam. This assertion is based on several contributing factors, including economic circumstances, education, arranged marriages, and premarital pregnancies. According to the Kyai, these factors inflict harm on both partners, thus advocating for the younger generation to refrain from early marriage.¹⁶

As educators, the Kyai in Lamongan Regency possess a commendable educational background, enabling them to engage with issues surrounding early marriage through online media, research findings, and discussions with various government institutions. Kyai Ahmad Hasan Al Banna noted that this acquired knowledge is utilised during religious lectures aimed at students, parents, and the community. For instance, he has conducted numerous analyses demonstrating that early marriage is a contributing factor to the divorce rate in Lamongan Regency. Consequently, he is committed to imparting an understanding of the quality of marriage in accordance with Islamic teachings.¹⁷

One initiative to enhance understanding among his students is the curriculum designed by the Islamic boarding school managed by KH Suparno, which focuses on moral reinforcement and character development. Similar to other traditional boarding schools, this

¹⁴ Siti Masiroh, "Data from Interviews with the Population and Family Planning Agency of Lamongan Regency" (Lamongan, 2024).

¹⁵ Masiroh.

¹⁶ Siti Masiroh, "Interview with Brondong Religious Affairs Office Staff" (2024).

¹⁷ Ahmad Hasan Al Banna, "Interview with the Caretaker of Al-Munawaroh Islamic Boarding School in Lamongan" (2024).

institution incorporates classical book learning methods in the fields of Aqidah, ethics, and Fiqh.¹⁸ The curriculum aims to fortify the foundational principles of the students' lives. In a manner akin to KH Hasan Al Banna, the boarding school enriches its curriculum with material addressing *nisā'iyyah* (women's issues) and *rijāliyyah* (men's issues). Within this curriculum, the Kyai provide insights into the laws governing marriage, preparations for marriage, an understanding of the dangers associated with early marriage, and the purpose of marriage according to Islamic teachings.¹⁹

"For me, participation provides an understanding of marriage according to religion. I have a socialisation programme every 6-12 months (there is also a special field for understanding marriage). At school, I provide material in accordance with the subject of religion, and I usually take advantage of that opportunity to convey this. Indeed, this process is not short. It must be continuously socialised on an ongoing basis."²⁰

In guiding the moral and mental development of his students, KH Suparno prioritises the enhancement of their spiritual aspect, aiming to strengthen their faith.²¹ In addition to fostering spiritual growth, KH Hasan assigns responsibilities to students in managing various organisations within the Islamic boarding school. The objective of these assignments is to cultivate the students' maturity, enrich their experience in life management, and augment their sense of accountability and responsibility. Consequently, the diverse responsibilities entrusted to them during their time at the Islamic boarding school prepare them to navigate their futures more effectively.²²

The Kyai also counsel the students' parents to oversee their children's development, ensuring they do not become involved in promiscuous environments. It is essential to instil religious values within the family context so that when students return home during holidays, they continue to uphold the values they acquired at the boarding school. Effective parenting and parental supervision play a critical role in maintaining the values instilled in students' lives while at the boarding school. Occasionally, when students return home for holidays, they may feel liberated from the strict discipline and regulations of the boarding school, leading the Kyai to express concern that students may struggle to manage their social interactions outside the boarding school environment. The Kyai typically convey their advice to parents when they come to collect their children before the boarding school holidays.²³

Furthermore, the Kyai consistently admonish the local community in their religious lectures to foster a conducive environment for the development of contemporary youth. Parental engagement and supervision are pivotal to a child's growth. Undoubtedly, the challenges faced by parents today are more pronounced, as their children navigate a period of considerable change, particularly in this era of disruption. These challenges necessitate that parents remain adaptable in responding to shifts in their children's behaviour. Consequently, both the Kyai and parents must position themselves as educators, counsellors, and mediators

¹⁸ Suparno Ali Basyir, "Interview with the Caretaker of the Darun Najah Islamic Boarding School in Lamongan" (2024).

¹⁹ Banna, "Interview with the Caretaker of Al-Munawaroh Islamic Boarding School in Lamongan."

²⁰ Banna.

²¹ Salman, "Interview with Teachers at the Darun Najah Islamic Boarding School, Lamongan" (2024).

²² Banna, "Interview with the Caretaker of Al-Munawaroh Islamic Boarding School in Lamongan."

²³ Alimin, "Interview with Teachers at Islamic Boarding Schools" (2024).

for any issues their children encounter. By cultivating a healthy environment, children are anticipated to flourish in terms of morals, mentality, character, and behaviour.²⁴

The efforts of the Kyai in educating their students represent a tangible manifestation of their role in preventing early marriage in Lamongan Regency. These efforts would undoubtedly be more effective if integrated with local government policies and regulations. For instance, Kiai Ali emphasises:

"I think the main function of a Kiai is to be an educator. To educate students. To guide the community. We have a religious and moral responsibility to the community. Through the community, I function as a teacher, a guide, and sometimes also as a motivator. Motivating, encouraging people to maintain harmony, and so on."²⁵

The collaboration among the government, relevant institutions, Islamic boarding schools, students' parents, and the community is crucial in addressing the various factors contributing to early marriage. This collaborative role is indeed positive and serves as a model for other communities aiming to reduce the rate of early marriage in Indonesia.

Analysis of the social role of Kyai in the prevention of early marriage

The functional approach to roles originated with Linton's work in 1936 and was subsequently formalised through the contributions of Parsons and Shils in 1951.²⁶ Generally, functional role theory centres on the behavioural characteristics of individuals occupying social positions within society. Roles are conceptualised as shared normative expectations that dictate and elucidate such behaviours. Consequently, functional role theory serves as a vocabulary for articulating the various 'parts' of a stable social system, as well as a framework for elucidating the reasons behind the system's stability and the manner in which it promotes conformity among participants.²⁷ This approach to role theory primarily emphasises two characteristics: the behaviours of individuals in specific social positions and the shared expectations surrounding those behaviours.

The social positions and role expectations of actors are also connected to the perspective of symbolic interactionism. The interest in the concept of roles among symbolic interactionists can be traced back to the work of Mead, which underscores the roles of each actor, the evolution of roles through social interaction, and the diverse cognitive constructs that social actors employ to comprehend and relate their own behaviours and those of others.²⁸ Roles are considered situational, as they are created through interaction. This perspective interprets roles as responses or reactions to the behaviours of others; thus, they cannot be experienced outside of that interaction.²⁹ These two perspectives on social role theory provide a comprehensive understanding of how social roles function within a social environment. Numerous frequently researched topics have been addressed, yet role theory has been

²⁴ Nur Kholis, "Interview with the Student's Guardian" (2024).

²⁵ Basyir, "Interview with the Caretaker of the Darun Najah Islamic Boarding School in Lamongan."

²⁶ B. J. Biddle, "Recent Developments in Role Theory," *Annual Review of Sociology* 12, no. 1 (August 1986): 67–92, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.so.12.080186.000435>; Talcott Parsons and Edward A Shils, "Values, Motives, and Systems of Action," *Toward a General Theory of Action* 33 (1951): 247–75.

²⁷ Biddle, "Recent Developments in Role Theory."

²⁸ George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self & Society*, ed. Charles W. Morris (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022).

²⁹ Lamya Benamar, Christine Balagué, and Mohamad Ghassany, "The Identification and Influence of Social Roles in a Social Media Product Community," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 22, no. 6 (November 1, 2017): 337–62, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcc4.12195>.

applied more broadly. However, in general, the application of social role concepts tends to perceive social function as a consequence of an individual's position and the various dynamics of interaction that emerge within it.

In the context of preventing early marriage in Lamongan, Kyai, as actors within the social system, effectively fulfil their roles within the community. The Kyai's expertise in Islamic religious values fosters positive expectations amidst the challenges posed by the adverse impacts of early marriage practices. They comprehend the issues at hand and devise strategies both within the boarding school curriculum and in the community through materials aimed at strengthening marriage. The role of the Kyai has significant implications for community participation in fostering a healthy environment, leading both the parents of students and the community to recognise that education is crucial to their children's welfare. This context could facilitate a decline in the rate of early marriage in Lamongan Regency in 2023 and 2024.

To streamline the application of social role theory in this study, the researcher has adapted it using the most recent contributions to the concept of social roles as proposed by Sebastian Harnisch.³⁰ Harnisch posits that roles, as social positions, are shaped by individual agency and evolving expectations related to the objectives of actors within organised groups. He tends to regard roles in relation to social aspects, as they involve other members and groups. This conceptualisation encompasses two elements: role expectations and role conceptions. Role expectations pertain to the anticipations directed at the actors assuming the role, while role conceptions refer to the actors' perceptions of their position relative to others (the ego component of the role) and their perceptions of the role expectations of others (the aspect that modifies the role), as demonstrated through language and actions.

The findings of this study indicate that the Kyai aims to develop the curriculum to address religiously-based social issues. The efforts of the Kyai demonstrate his active engagement as a religious figure amidst prevalent social challenges. Unsurprisingly, confronting the tradition or culture of early marriage is a formidable task, particularly given the economic uncertainties faced by families, which serve as a significant determinant. Nonetheless, in this context, the Kyai equips students, parents, and the community with a pertinent approach to disseminating information regarding the implications of early marriage in Indonesia. The role of the Kyai in Lamongan undoubtedly reinforces the findings of Sainun's (2024) research, which highlights the role of the Tuan Guru in West Nusa Tenggara in preventing early marriage.³¹

The role of Kyai in preventing early marriage from the perspective of *maslahah*

Early marriage, as indicated by numerous studies, has adverse effects on mental health, physical health, the loss of educational rights, the deprivation of children's developmental rights, and increased vulnerability to domestic violence, among other issues.³² Nevertheless, in certain regions, couples who marry early are found to coexist within harmonious households. Family harmony is characterised by the presence of *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and

³⁰ Sebastian Harnisch, *Role Theory in International Relations*, ed. Sebastian Harnisch, Cornelia Frank, and Hanns W Maull, *Role Theory in International Relations* (Routledge, 2011), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203818756>.

³¹ Sainun, Zarkasih, and Sugitanata, "Tuan Guru and the Efforts to Prevent Early Marriage Among Sasak Tribe."

³² Emaj Uddin, *Social, Political, and Health Implications of Early Marriage*, ed. Emaj Uddin, *Advances in Psychology, Mental Health, and Behavioral Studies* (United State of America: IGI Global, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-3394-5>.

rahmah. For a household to be deemed harmonious, at least three criteria must be met. Firstly, the family must be maintained, fulfilled, and preserved in accordance with *maqāṣid sharia* (the objectives of Islamic law). Secondly, within the family unit, both spouses must fulfil their respective rights and obligations. Lastly, the fulfilment and implementation of family functions must be ensured.³³

In analysing existing issues, particularly those associated with early marriage, the theory of *maṣlahah* can be employed to evaluate whether an action is beneficial and thus recommended, or harmful and therefore to be avoided. Terminologically, *maṣlahah* can be interpreted as the pursuit of good and the rejection of evil to uphold the objectives of sharia.³⁴ The five essential aspects of sharia that must be upheld are religion, life, intellect, lineage, and wealth. Activities that fundamentally aim to protect these five aspects are considered *maṣlahah*. Furthermore, the rejection of all forms of evil related to these five aspects is also regarded as *maṣlahah*.³⁵

Research data concerning the high incidence of early marriage in Lamongan, East Java Province, Indonesia, indicates that prevention is an urgent matter (*ḍarūriyyah*). In the principles of *usul fiqh*, the urgency of prevention is seen as a matter of public interest. The principle of necessity, or *ḍarūriyyah*, is a significant concept in Islamic law that permits the relaxation of certain prohibitions under specific conditions to safeguard essential values such as life, religion, reason, lineage, and property. This principle is deeply embedded in the objectives of Islamic law, known as *maqāṣid sharia*, which seeks to promote welfare and prevent immorality. The application of necessity must satisfy certain conditions: it must not conflict with the applicable principles of Islamic law (sharia), and it must address serious threats to essential values such as life, religion, reason, lineage, and property.³⁶

The findings of the study reveal that the involvement of Kyai in efforts to prevent early marriage in Lamongan is beneficial for the community. Kyai serve not only as educators within educational institutions but also as individuals attuned to the challenges of child development in the modern era. Kyai recognise that the high rate of early marriage in Lamongan constitutes an emergency, given that children are growing up in environments deficient in religious literacy. Consequently, Islamic boarding schools serve as strategic venues for instilling Islamic values, with the hope of strengthening students' faith during their time outside educational institutions. The efforts of Kyai within the framework of *maqāṣid sharia* align with the objective of safeguarding the religious beliefs of their students (*hifz ad-dīn*). The boarding school education system supports the findings of Armyn Hasibuan et al. (2025), which assert that boarding schools play a critical role in character development through various educational and extracurricular activities. These Islamic boarding schools contribute to character formation, including spiritual and moral education, which is integrated with a community-based lifestyle reflecting holistic development.³⁷

³³ Zubaidah and Zahiri, "The Concepts of Sakinah, Mawaddah and Rahmah as Foundation for Marital Happiness According to the Holy Qur'an: An Analysis Based on Ayat 21, Surah Al-Rum."

³⁴ Felicitas Opwis, "Maslaha in Contemporary Islamic Legal Theory," *Islamic Law and Society* 12, no. 2 (2005): 182–223, <https://doi.org/10.1163/1568519054093699>.

³⁵ Hayatullah Laluddin et al., "An Analysis of Maslahah's Development Through Al-Ghazali Pre and Post Al-Ghazali Periods," *International Business Management* 6, no. 2 (February 1, 2012): 187–93, <https://doi.org/10.3923/ibm.2012.187.193>.

³⁶ Husnul Fatarib, Muhammad Qasem, and Meirison Meirison, "Al-Hājat As The Basis Of Contemporary Ijtihād," *AL-'ADALAH* 17, no. 1 (November 30, 2020): 163–86, <https://doi.org/10.24042/adalah.v17i1.6209>.

³⁷ Armyn Hasibuan et al., "Sufistic Approach of Character Education in an Indonesian Islamic Boarding School," *MIQOT: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 49, no. 1 (June 30, 2025): 184, <https://doi.org/10.30821/miqot.v49i1.1332>.

Moreover, parents' preoccupation with work results in a lack of supervision while their children are at home. Therefore, Kyai, acting as substitute parental figures for students in Islamic boarding schools, endeavour to reinforce the foundations of religious values. Kyai teach what marriage entails, its purpose, the legalities surrounding marriage, and methods for establishing a family through various formal and informal activities. The curriculum is designed to emulate real-life scenarios in society, compelling students to learn socialisation while upholding religious values. The role of the Kyai and the pesantren institution embodies the value of *maṣlahah*, specifically in safeguarding the lives of the younger generation, namely Hifz Nafs. Muhammad Ikhsan and Azwar Iskandar (2021) elucidate that according to Syatibi, the value of *maṣlahah* is inseparable from the principles of *maqāṣid sharia*, both in theory and practice.³⁸

The findings of this study also indicate that the role of the Kyai in providing guidance to the guardians of students and the broader community further solidifies a comprehensive prevention model in addressing the complexities of early marriage. Several studies identify one contributing factor to early marriage as the economic pressures faced by parents who are unable to finance their children's education, coupled with the strong influence of community traditions.³⁹ Kyai in Lamongan continually remind the community that children possess the right to grow and develop properly. Girls should not be regarded as commodities of the family; thus, parents bear the responsibility of educating and caring for them. A nurturing family environment fosters a quality generation, while inadequate parenting can lead to children experiencing depression and increased susceptibility to promiscuity. The insights of the Kyai are likely to receive heightened attention from parents and the wider community, given his status as a respected religious authority. Hence, the efforts of the Kyai align with the principles of *maṣlahah*, particularly in the aspects of protecting reason (*hifz al-ʿaql*) and progeny (*hifz al-naṣl*). The role of the Kyai in educating the guardians of santri and the community at large is reinforced by the findings of a study by Rafeah Nurzahidah Haji Jaapar Saidon et al. (2017), which demonstrate that the theory of *maqāṣid sharia* is highly relevant in addressing contemporary challenges related to Muslim marriage.⁴⁰

The results of this study significantly contribute to the development of a model for preventing early marriage in Indonesia, particularly through the involvement of all stakeholders, including educators, governmental bodies, parents, and the community. A pivotal element in the prevention of early marriage is the Kyai and Islamic boarding schools. The Kyai possesses foundational expertise as an instructor in imparting religious values education to students. Simultaneously, the Kyai is respected by the guardians of students and the general public, positioning him as a strategic mediator. Consequently, the government should maximise the role of Kyai as agents in controlling and preventing early marriage. This study concludes that the role of Kyai in Lamongan Regency can serve as a model for realising the objectives of marriage according to Islamic law while mitigating the risks associated with early marriage.

³⁸ Muhammad Ikhsan and Azwar Iskandar, "Abu Ishaq Al-Syathibi and His Perspective on Maslahat," *AT-TURAS: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 8, no. 1 (June 30, 2021): 60–73, <https://doi.org/10.33650/at-turas.v8i1.1997>.

³⁹ Widiyanto, Zumrotun, and Saputra, "The Prevention of Underage Marriage in Indonesia: State, Religious Authority and Human Rights."

⁴⁰ Rafeah Nurzahidah Haji Jaapar Saidon et al., "Preventing Illegal Marriages in the Light of Maqasid Al-Shariah," *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 25, no. January (2017).

Conclusion

Marriages in Lamongan Regency, East Java Province, Indonesia, have experienced significant fluctuations in numbers. Data obtained from the Religious Court and other related institutions indicate an increase from 2017 to 2022, followed by a gradual decline from 2023 to 2024. According to field research, the decrease in early marriages can be attributed to the efforts of various stakeholders, particularly religious leaders. In Lamongan, Kyai (religious leaders) and Islamic boarding schools actively engage in addressing the issue of early marriage. Kyai and these educational institutions reinforce religious values among their students. Their approach involves augmenting the curriculum with both formal and informal activities, such as regular recitation of the Qur'an, which includes instruction on the fiqh of marriage (*munakahat*). Kyai in Lamongan Regency aspire for their students to gain a foundational understanding of the significance of marriage. A comprehensive understanding of this concept is essential for preventing individuals from succumbing to the pressures of early marriage, which is often influenced by cultural norms and promiscuity.

In addition to their educational roles, Kyai also fulfil a social function for the guardians of students and the broader community. Guardians are frequently provided with guidance on effective parenting, the detrimental effects of early marriage, and appropriate supervision of their children at home. Similar counsel is extended to the community during public recitations and Friday sermons.

The role and social function of Kyai in Lamongan Regency present a compelling case, contributing to the effective functioning of the social structure, which encompasses local government, Islamic boarding schools, religious leaders, guardians of students, and the community at large. The collaborative oversight of all parties fosters a healthy and conducive environment. This initiative aligns with the concept of *maslahat*, or public benefit, frequently referenced in Islamic law. These values of benefit underpin the principles of Islamic law (*maqāṣid sharia*), which aim to protect children's religion (*hifz ad-dīn*), preserve their intellect for continued education (*hifz al-ʿaql*), safeguard their souls through spiritual values (*hifz al-naḥs*), and shield them from the adverse consequences of promiscuity (*hifz al-naṣl*).

The findings of this research present a model for the prevention of early marriage applicable to the wider community, supported by a robust functionalist structural system. Consequently, this study advocates for the government to optimise the role and function of Kyai or religious leaders as educators within the community, thereby enhancing efforts to prevent early marriage in a more effective and strategic manner.

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