



## Communication Strategies of the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) in Preventing Early Marriage: A Case Study of Medan Tuntungan District

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### A B S T R A C T

This study aims to analyze the communication patterns of the Medan Tuntungan District Religious Affairs Office (KUA) in preventing early marriage. Early marriage remains a social problem in urban areas, influenced by social, cultural, economic, and religious factors, necessitating effective communication strategies. This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive phenomenological design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation studies with purposively selected informants including the Head of the KUA, religious instructors, community leaders, parents, and adolescents. The results indicate that the Medan Tuntungan KUA implements a multidimensional communication pattern consisting of linear, interactional, and transactional patterns. The linear pattern is used in mass outreach through lectures and counseling, the interactional pattern is applied in dialogical premarital counseling, and the transactional pattern is seen in cross-sector collaboration with schools, community health centers, and community leaders. These three patterns operate simultaneously and complement each other in raising public awareness about the dangers of early marriage. Furthermore, the results also indicate that the rate of early marriage in this area is relatively low. The conclusion of this study confirms that the success of communication to prevent early marriage is influenced by the KUA's ability to build adaptive, participatory, and collaborative communication. The main obstacle identified was limited facilities, but this can be overcome by utilizing community social spaces. This research contributes to the development of development communication and organizational communication studies in the context of preventing social problems.

### INTRODUCTION

Early marriage is still a social problem that continues to be found in various regions of Indonesia, including in urban areas such as Medan Tuntungan District, Medan City. This phenomenon shows a shift in character from what was previously synonymous with rural areas to also occur in urban areas with more heterogeneous communities. This condition indicates that early marriage is not just a matter of marriage age, but is the result of a complex interaction between social, cultural, economic, educational, and religious factors living in society.

A number of studies have shown that early marriage has a multidimensional impact (Utami et al., 2023) emphasized that cases of early marriage are now also increasing in urban areas and not only limited to rural areas. Meanwhile, (Pradikta, 2023) explained that early marriage has an impact on the biological, psychological, educational, economic, and social aspects of the couple. This impact shows that early marriage is not only an individual issue, but also has an impact on the quality of social development of the community. (Riva'i & AHWA, 2016) explained that development communication is a process of exchanging messages carried out to encourage social change towards better conditions.

In the context of policy, the Indonesian government has stipulated Law Number 16 of 2019 concerning Marriage which changes the minimum age of marriage to 19 years for men and women. This policy is a form of communication of state policies in protecting children and adolescents from the risks of early marriage. However, policy implementation at the community

level still faces challenges because it is influenced by cultural norms, economic conditions, and diverse religious understandings. This shows that policy success depends not only on regulation, but also on the effectiveness of communicating behavior change at the grassroots level.

In the perspective of development communication and behavior change communication, communication not only functions as an information delivery, but also as a process to build awareness, attitude change, and community participation (Rogers, 2003). Research by (Kriyantono, 2019) which states that communication in social change requires strategies, approaches, and interaction patterns that are in accordance with the characteristics of the target community. Thus, the effectiveness of KUA communication in preventing early marriage is greatly influenced by the ability of officers to adjust the communication approach to the diverse socio-cultural conditions of the people of Medan Tuntungan.

Further, (Furna & Saleh, 2026) emphasized that development communication emphasizes the active participation of the community in the process of social change. However, in the context of preventing early marriage, international studies have focused more on the role of the media, formal education, and reproductive health policies, while the role of local religious institutions as actors in development communication is still relatively underexplored. In Indonesia, the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) has a strategic position as an institution that interacts directly with the community in marriage matters. KUA not only functions as an administrative institution, but also as a

social communication agent that conducts education, premarital counseling, and religious counseling. KUA Medan Tuntungan District is an example of an institution that carries out this function through various communication approaches to the community. In organizational communication practices, KUA carries out internal and external communication processes to achieve institutional goals. (Hasan Husaini, 2025) Organizational communication plays an important role in building coordination, understanding, and program effectiveness. Meanwhile, in the context of development communication, the approach used must be participatory, dialogical, and adaptive to the social conditions of the community (Lestari et al., 2018).

However, the integration between organizational communication approaches and development communication in the context of early marriage prevention has not been studied in depth. Several previous studies have shown that interpersonal communication in the family has an effect on preventing early marriage (Puspita, 2022) while (Pradnya et al., 2024) highlighting the importance of organizational communication in the effectiveness of public services. In addition, (Anugerahayu & Setiawan, 2025) emphasizing the importance of multi-stakeholder collaboration in preventing early marriage. However, there are several *Research gap* that is still unanswered, namely Previous research has focused more on the role of family, school, or government, has not specifically examined the communication patterns of religious institutions (KUA). The existing communication study is still partial, not yet integrating organizational communication and development communication simultaneously. Previous studies have not addressed linear, interactional, and transactional communication patterns in the context of early marriage prevention. Research in urban areas (urban context) is still limited, even though the social character is more complex than in rural areas. There have not been many studies that examine KUA as a behavior change communication agent in social issues.

Based on this gap, this study uses Schramm's approach to communication pattern theory (linear, interactional, and transactional) and supported by Rogers' theory of organizational communication (Pace & Faules) and behavior change communication to analyze how KUA builds communication strategies in preventing early marriage. In addition, from an Islamic perspective, effective communication must also be carried out with a wisdom approach, good advice, and polite dialogue as stated in the Qur'an. An-Nahl:125. This reinforces that KUA communication is not only structural, but also normative-religious.

In QS. An-Nahl verse 125, Allah SWT. says: *'Call (people) to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a good way.'* This verse emphasizes that effective communication must be done with a wise, persuasive, and wise approach. Then in QS. Al-Isra verse 32 explains: *'And do not approach adultery; Indeed, adultery is an abominable deed and a bad way.'* This verse is a moral foundation for KUA in providing education to the public to understand the importance of maintaining relationships and preparing for marriage thoroughly according to Islamic teachings.

This study aims to analyze the communication patterns of KUA in the prevention of early marriage. Identify organizational communication strategies and development communication used. Knowing the obstacles and efforts made in optimizing communication to prevent early marriage. This research is important because it contributes to the development of the

theory of communication of development and organizational communication in the context of religious institutions. Strengthening the study of behavior change communication in socio-religious issues. Providing practical recommendations for KUA in improving the effectiveness of communication to prevent early marriage in urban areas.

## METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to deeply understand the communication patterns applied by the Medan Tuntungan District KUA in the prevention of early marriage. The qualitative approach was chosen because this study focuses on understanding social processes, communication practices, and meanings that arise in the interaction between KUA and society, not on testing the relationship between variables. This is in line with the view (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). that qualitative research aims to understand social phenomena holistically in their natural context. In contrast to phenomenological design, this study does not focus on individual lived experiences, but on institutional communication practices and organizational interaction patterns. Therefore, the approach used is more appropriate as a descriptive qualitative with a focus on organizational communication analysis and development communication, which allows researchers to systematically describe how KUA communication patterns take place in the field (Pulford, 2023).

This research was conducted at the Religious Affairs Office (KUA) of Medan Tuntungan District, Medan City, North Sumatra. This location was chosen because KUA has a strategic role in marriage services, coaching, and education, including the prevention of early marriage in areas with heterogeneous urban community characteristics. The research was carried out for three months, namely January-March 2026, through a gradual process of observation, interviews, and documentation.

The research data consisted of primary data, in the form of interview results and field observations. Secondary data, in the form of official KUA documents such as activity reports, marriage data, counseling materials, and marriage dispensation archives. Informants were selected using purposive sampling techniques, which are based on direct involvement and knowledge of the research focus (Mujibur et al., 2023). The number of informants in this study was 10 people, consisting of 1 Head of KUA of Medan Tuntungan District, 3 Islamic Religious Extension Officers, 1 marriage service administration staff, 2 community leaders/religious leaders, 2 parents, 1 teenager who had participated in the socialization of KUA. The selection of informants was carried out to obtain diverse perspectives on KUA communication patterns in preventing early marriage (Adlini et al., 2022).

Data was collected through three main techniques In-depth (semi-structured) interviews were conducted with all informants to explore communication patterns, message delivery strategies, and obstacles faced by KUA. Each interview lasts about 45–90 minutes, recorded with the informant's consent, then transcribed verbatim. Non-participatory observation Observation is carried out on KUA communication activities such as counseling, premarital guidance, and community socialization to see firsthand the interaction patterns that occur. Documentation studies The documents analyzed included KUA program reports, marriage data, marriage dispensation archives, and counseling materials as field data reinforcement. (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Data analysis using interactive models (Miles et al., 2023) which has been carried out simultaneously since data collection. The analysis process is carried out through three main stages Data reduction (data condensation) The interview results are transcribed, then initial coding (open coding) is carried out to identify units of meaning such as linear communication patterns, interactional communication patterns, transactional communication patterns, KUA communication strategies, communication barriers.

After that, code grouping (axial coding) is carried out to form the main categories, for example educational communication strategies, collaborative communication across sectors, interpersonal communication with the community. Data presentation (data display) The data that has been categorized is presented in the form of a thematic narrative and matrix table so that the relationship between themes can be seen systematically. Conclusion drawing and verification Conclusions are drawn based on the dominant communication pattern and are verified through source triangulation, method triangulation, and member checking to ensure the validity of findings. The validity of the data is maintained through triangulation of sources (various informants). Triangulation method (interview, observation, documentation) Member checking (confirmation of results to informants) (Zakariah, Askari & Afriani, 2020).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Communication Patterns in Early Marriage Prevention in Tuntungan District

The results of the study show that KUA Medan Tuntungan District applies three communication patterns in preventing early marriage, namely linear, interactional, and transactional communication patterns. The most important finding is not just the existence of the three patterns, but how they are used in stages and complement each other in building awareness, changing attitudes, and strengthening people's behavior. Based on the results of interviews and observations, researchers found that the effectiveness of KUA communication does not lie in the use of one particular communication pattern, but in the ability to integrate the three patterns according to the characteristics of the audience and the communication situation.

The Head of KUA Medan Tuntungan District explained, *'If it's just a lecture, the public usually listens, but it doesn't necessarily understand. Therefore, after counseling, we usually open consultation sessions and work together with schools and community leaders so that the message conveyed can continue to be remembered and implemented.'* The statement suggests that linear communication is only the initial stage of information dissemination. In practice, KUA does not stop at delivering one-way messages, but continues the communication process through dialogue and collaboration across institutions.

#### Linear Communication Patterns as an Early Awareness Stage

The findings of the study show that linear communication patterns are used through counseling activities, religious lectures, socialization in schools, and community forums. At this stage, KUA acts as a source of information that conveys messages about the impact of early marriage, the age limit for marriage, and the importance of mental readiness before marriage. These findings are in line with communication theory (Shannon & Weaver, 1998) which explains that communication is the process of conveying messages from communicators to communicators

through certain channels. In the context of this research, KUA acts as a source of information that seeks to increase public knowledge about the risks of early marriage.

The results of this study also support the research (Safira & Deni, 2024) who found that community-based counseling was effective in increasing public knowledge about adolescent reproductive health. However, this study found that linear communication is not enough to produce a profound change in attitudes. Obstacles in the form of differences in educational levels, local culture, and public perceptions of marriage cause some messages to not be fully received by the audience. In the perspective of development communication (Rogers, 2003) explained that the dissemination of information is the initial stage in the process of social change. Therefore, linear communication serves as a stage of awareness formation, but it is not yet the main factor that drives behavior change.

### Patterns of Interactional Communication as a Mechanism for Attitude Change

The study found that interactive communication takes place through premarital counseling, family consultation, and interpersonal communication between KUA officers and the community. At this stage, there is a dialogue that allows people to convey their experiences, concerns, and reasons that drive early marriage planning. A religious counselor stated: *'Many parents initially want to marry their children quickly for economic reasons or fear that their children will get along wrong. After being invited to discuss and be given understanding, some began to reconsider the decision.'*

The findings show that the change in attitude does not occur because the community receives information alone, but because of a process of exchanging meaning and mutual reflection between communicators and communicators. These findings are in line with the interactive communication model (Quarterly & Sikumbang, 2023) which emphasizes the importance of feedback in the communication process. In addition, the results of this study support the participatory communication approach developed (Novitasari et al., 2022) which states that social change is more effective when people are actively involved in the communication process. The study also reinforces the findings (Puspita, 2022) which states that interpersonal communication has an important role in preventing early marriage because it is able to build emotional closeness and trust. In this study, it was found that people are more open to conveying family problems when communication is done personally and non-judgmentally.

### Transactional Communication Patterns as a Social Strengthening Mechanism

The most prominent finding in this study is the transactional communication pattern that takes place through collaboration between KUA, schools, health centers, religious leaders, village officials, and community organizations. In this pattern, each party plays the role of a communicator as well as a communicator who jointly spreads the message of preventing early marriage.

One of the community leaders stated, *'If only the KUA conveys it, the influence is limited. But when schools, ustaz, and health centers convey the same message, the community becomes more trusting and easier to accept.'*

These findings show that the effectiveness of communication is not only determined by the quality of the message, but also by the consistency of the messages that people receive from various trusted sources. In the perspective of Barnlund's (2008)

transactional communication theory, communication is understood as a process of creating meaning together that takes place dynamically and sustainably. The results of this study show that this process does not only occur between individuals, but also between organizations that have the same social goals. These findings also support research (Thareeq Akbar Perkasa & Rafinita Aditia, 2023) who found that cross-sector collaboration is an important factor in the success of early marriage prevention programs. In addition, the results of this study strengthen the organizational communication theory of the (Utami et al., 2023) which explains that the effectiveness of public organizations is greatly influenced by the ability to build vertical, horizontal, and diagonal communication networks.

### KUA's Tiered Communication Model in Early Marriage Prevention

The main contribution of this research is the discovery of the KUA Tiered Communication Model in Early Marriage Prevention. In contrast to previous research which generally only discussed one form of communication separately, this study shows that the three communication patterns form mutually integrated communication stages. In the first stage, linear communication functions to build public awareness (awareness). The second stage, interactive communication functions to build understanding and attitude change. The third stage is transactional communication to strengthen social norms and the sustainability of behavioral change through the collaboration of various social actors (behavior reinforcement).

These findings expand the theory of development communication (Rogers, 2003) and (Tahir et al., 2024) by showing that changes in people's behavior do not occur instantly, but through a gradual communication process that involves information delivery, participatory dialogue, and social strengthening. In addition, this study enriches the study of organizational communication because it shows that religious institutions such as KUA can function as a center for coordination of cross-sector communication in dealing with social problems of the community. Thus, this study offers a new perspective that the effectiveness of early marriage prevention communication is not determined by the dominance of one communication pattern, but by the integration of linear, interactional, and transactional communication patterns in an adaptive, participatory, and collaborative communication system.

### Obstacles Faced by KUA in the Implementation of Communication Patterns

The results of in-depth interviews and observations showed that the KUA of Medan Tuntungan District did not face substantial obstacles in the implementation of communication to prevent early marriage. Most of the informants stated that counseling, counseling, and socialization activities can be carried out regularly and receive a fairly good response from the community. These findings show that from the aspect of human resources and communication competence, KUA officers have adequate abilities to carry out education and coaching functions to the community.

However, the study found technical obstacles in the form of limited facilities and space capacity available for the implementation of socialization activities. These limitations are especially felt when the number of participants who attend exceeds the capacity of the available space in the KUA office. The

Head of KUA Medan Tuntungan District explained *'The most frequent obstacles we face are actually not the community, but rather the limited space. Sometimes there are enough participants to attend so that the available room is not able to accommodate all participants optimally.'*

The findings show that the obstacles faced by KUA are more structural and technical than communication barriers. From the perspective of organizational communication, this condition can be categorized as an obstacle that comes from the limitations of the organization's supporting facilities, not from the process of delivering the message itself (Thareeq Akbar Perkasa & Rafinita Aditia, 2023). Interestingly, this study found that limited facilities do not directly hinder the sustainability of communication programs. As a form of adaptation, KUA utilizes various social spaces such as mosques, prayer rooms, village halls, schools, and meeting halls as alternative locations for the implementation of activities. This strategy allows the communication program to continue to run even though the facilities available at the KUA office are relatively limited.

A religious counselor stated *'If there is not enough room in the office, we usually work with mosques, schools, or village offices. In fact, sometimes people are more comfortable when activities are carried out in their own environment.'* This statement shows the organization's adaptability in dealing with limited resources. From a development communication perspective, the ability to utilize local resources and engage communities is one of the characteristics of a participatory approach that supports the effectiveness of social programs (Nurhalizah, 2025) and (Kautsar & Manurung, 2026). Thus, limited facilities are not always an obstacle if the organization is able to build a network of cooperation with various elements of society.

The findings of this study are in line with the research (Zaman & Izzuddin, 2024) which shows that the success of community-based social programs is more determined by the collaboration capacity and creativity of program implementers than the availability of facilities alone. The results of this study also support the findings (Heryanti & Usia, 2021) which states that the use of community social space can increase the reach of public communication, especially in programs that require direct community involvement. However, this study did not find sufficient empirical evidence to conclude that the effectiveness of KUA communication directly affects the low rate of early marriage in Medan Tuntungan District. Although some informants stated that cases of early marriage were relatively rare, the study did not use longitudinal statistical data or cross-regional comparative analysis that could be used to objectively measure the relationship.

Therefore, the findings of this study only show that KUA has carried out various communication activities to prevent early marriage actively and adaptively, without claiming that there is a direct causal relationship with the rate of early marriage in the study area. Based on these findings, the main contribution of this research lies in understanding the adaptability of KUA communication in dealing with limited facilities. This study shows that the flexibility of the use of community social spaces, collaboration with various local institutions, and community-based communication approaches are important factors that support the sustainability of early marriage prevention programs. These findings enrich the study of development communication and organizational communication by showing that the effectiveness of public communication is not only determined by the availability of physical means, but also by the ability of

organizations to build social networks and utilize community resources in a participatory manner.

Table 1. Data KAU Medan Tuntungan

| Year | Number of Marriages | Marriage Age <19 Years Old | Percentage |
|------|---------------------|----------------------------|------------|
| 2023 | 250                 | 75                         | 30%        |
| 2024 | 300                 | 65                         | 21%        |
| 2025 | 350                 | 50                         | 14%        |

\*KUA data shows a downward trend in early marriage over the past three years. Although the study was not designed to test causal relationships, the findings indicate that KUA's communication programs have the potential to contribute to increasing public awareness.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research and discussion, it can be concluded that the KUA of Medan Tuntungan District implements a multidimensional communication pattern in an effort to prevent early marriage, which includes linear, interactional, and transactional patterns. The three patterns run simultaneously and complement each other in accordance with the context of communication, both in the form of mass socialization, premarital counseling, and cross-sector cooperation with schools, health centers, religious leaders, and local governments. These findings show that the effectiveness of communication to prevent early marriage is not only determined by the delivery of information, but also by the ability of KUA to build dialogue, social relations, and sustainable collaboration with the community. In addition, the low rate of early marriage in the Medan Tuntungan area indicates that the communication strategy implemented by KUA has a positive contribution in increasing public awareness of the importance of age and mental readiness in marriage. On the other hand, this study also found that the main obstacle faced by KUA does not lie in the aspect of communication or officer competence, but in the limited facilities and capacity of rooms for large-scale socialization activities. However, these limitations are not a significant obstacle because KUA is able to adapt through the use of community social spaces such as mosques, prayer rooms, and village halls.

This shows that there is a community-based communication pattern that actually expands the reach of prevention messages. Thus, it can be emphasized that the success of KUA communication is greatly influenced by the flexibility, creativity, and adaptability of institutions in utilizing the social resources available in the community. However, this study has some limitations. First, this study only focuses on one location, namely KUA Medan Tuntungan District, so the results of the study cannot be generalized widely to other areas with different social characteristics. Second, this research focuses more on the perspective of KUA officers and several related informants, so it is possible that there are still other perspectives from the community that have not been explored in depth. Third, the limited research time also affects the depth of observation on the dynamics of long-term communication. Therefore, further research is recommended to expand the research location, involve more variety of informants, and examine the effectiveness of digital media-based communication in preventing early marriage in order to obtain a more comprehensive picture.

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