

The Role of KUA Meral District, Karimun Regency, in Minimizing Underhanded Marriage Practices (Siri Marriage)

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INDEXING	ABSTRACT
Keywords: Keyword 1; Unregistered Marriage Keyword 2; KUA Development Keyword 3; Legal Literacy Keyword 4; Local Culture Keyword 5; Karimun Regency	The phenomenon of unofficial marriages still poses a serious challenge in Meral District, Karimun Regency. This practice, which is deemed valid according to religion, is often chosen as a quick and cheap alternative without considering the legal and social impacts, particularly for women and children. This research aims to analyze the role of the KUA (Office of Religious Affairs) in Meral District in minimizing the practice of unregistered marriages, identifying the obstacles faced, and formulating a more adaptive follow-up strategy. A qualitative approach is used through observations, in-depth interviews with religious counselors, community leaders, couples in unregistered marriages, and analysis of official KUA documents. The research findings indicate that the main obstacles include limited human resources, inadequate educational facilities, strong cultural influences, and low legal literacy among the community. The proposed strategic recommendations include increasing and strengthening the capacity of religious counselors, digitizing educational materials, implementing contextual cultural-based approaches, and enhancing cross-sector collaboration with schools, community health centers, and village authorities. These efforts are expected to gradually raise legal awareness and reduce the practice of unregistered marriages, thereby better ensuring the protection of women's and children's rights.

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INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a sacred bond as well as a social contract that has religious, cultural, and legal dimensions. From a religious perspective, marriage is viewed as an act of worship and a sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad aimed at maintaining honor, lineage, and peaceful living (Irade et al., 2024). In Indonesian positive law, marriage is regulated by Law No. 1 of 1974 on Marriage, which emphasizes that a marriage is valid if it is conducted according to religious law and officially registered by the state. Article 2 paragraph (2) of this law states that “Every marriage shall be registered according to the prevailing laws and regulations.” This means that even though the marriage contract is valid according to religion, without registration, the marriage does not have legal force from the state (Moelyono et al, 2023 ; Permana, 2024).

The revision through Law Number 16 of 2019 further emphasizes the importance of marriage registration, including raising the minimum age for marriage to 19 years for both men and women. This provision aims to reduce the rate of early marriage, which has various social issues, including divorce, reproductive health, and the legal status

uncertainty of children (Fitria *et al.*, 2023). On the other hand, the Compilation of Islamic Law (KHI), particularly Article 5 paragraph (1), states that 'Marriage can only be proven by a Marriage Certificate issued by a Marriage Registrar.' This provision clarifies that registration is not merely a formality but a legal evidence that guarantees legal certainty (Romli and Zaelani, 2020 ; Widiani, 2022 ; Marni *et al.*, 2023).

However, social reality shows that the practice of underhanded marriage (nikah siri) is still quite prevalent in various regions, including in Meral District, Karimun Regency, Riau Islands Province. This practice is viewed as a quick and practical solution by some members of society. Factors such as lower costs, simple procedures, and the belief that an unrecorded marriage is still valid religiously make this practice difficult to eradicate. In fact, the long-term consequences of this practice are very complex, including issues of the legal status of children, inheritance rights, legal protection for women, and difficulties in accessing public services such as education and healthcare. This phenomenon requires the active role of the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) not only to facilitate the recording of marriages but also to provide structured, sustainable, and culturally adaptive guidance.

Meral District is one of the densely populated areas in Karimun Regency, with a population of 53,255 based on data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in 2023, consisting of 27,380 males and 25,875 females, with a population density of about 846 people/km². Socio-culturally, the Meral community is known to be heterogeneous, with a majority practicing Islam, but enriched by the cultural interactions of Malays, Bugis, and Javanese that have been ongoing since trading migration decades ago. This heterogeneity brings its own dynamics, including in marriage practices, where some communities still view early marriage or unregistered marriage as a natural, even honorable choice, to maintain family honor or avoid “social stigma.”

The trend of official marriages in Meral District shows a relatively stable figure. According to KUA records, the number of officially registered marriages was 260 couples in 2022, 262 couples in 2023, and 266 couples in 2024. However, this stable trend does not correspond with the decrease in unregistered marriage practices. The phenomenon of underage marriage even shows a significant increase, from 20 cases in 2022 to 31 cases in 2023, and reaching 35 cases in 2024. In line with this, the number of pregnancies outside of marriage also increased, from 11 cases in 2022, rising to 20 cases in 2023, and reaching 25 cases in 2024. This data indicates that the existing guidance programs have not fully succeeded in changing the paradigm and behavior of the community regarding the importance of officially registering marriages.

As an official institution under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the KUA of Meral District has a dual mandate: to register marriages and to provide guidance for harmonious families. Through the Marriage Guidance Program (Bimwin), family law counseling, and collaboration with schools and religious organizations, KUA seeks to raise public awareness about the importance of formal marriages. However, the limited number of counselors, inadequate facilities, and a less varied approach to counseling pose significant obstacles that reduce the effectiveness of the program.

This situation indicates that the interventions need to be more adaptive, involving cultural and religious leaders as strategic partners, as well as utilizing digital technology to reach the younger generation who are more familiar with social media. A culturally-based approach and cross-sector collaboration with schools, community health centers,

and village apparatus will strengthen the ecosystem of sustainable development. Thus, the development is not only formal but also addresses the root problems that are entrenched in the culture and behavior of society.

In light of the increasing trends of early marriage, out-of-wedlock pregnancies, and the practice of unregistered marriages, this research has become very urgent to conduct. Without targeted and continuous intervention, these practices have the potential to cause long-term social problems, including structural poverty, gender inequality, and psychosocial issues for children born from unregistered marriages. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the role of the Meral Subdistrict Religious Affairs Office in minimizing the practice of unregistered marriages, identifying the obstacles faced, and formulating more adaptive follow-up strategies that align with local conditions.

The problem formulation in this study includes three main questions: what is the role of the KUA Meral Sub-district coaching in minimizing the practice of unregistered marriages, what obstacles are faced in the implementation of the coaching, and what strategies can be carried out to improve the effectiveness of coaching in the future. Based on this problem formulation, this study aims to analyze the effectiveness of the coaching conducted, identify internal and external obstacles, and develop strategic recommendations that can be implemented using a cultural-based approach.

Theoretically, this research is expected to contribute to the scientific literature on family development and marriage law enforcement at the sub-district level. Meanwhile, practically, this research provides concrete recommendations for KUA, local governments, and community leaders to develop more effective, sustainable, and socially and culturally appropriate development programs for the Meral community.

The originality of this research lies in its specific focus on the Meral District, by integrating official quantitative data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) and Religious Affairs Office (KUA), along with qualitative analysis from in-depth interviews and field observations. This approach enables the researcher to provide a more comprehensive picture of social dynamics, obstacles, and potential solutions that can be applied. The results of this research are expected to serve as a reference for public policy and family development programs that are more adaptive, effective, and have a real impact in reducing the practice of unregistered marriages.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The practice of unofficial marriages has serious impacts, both socially and legally (Agustin et al., 2025). Legal uncertainty is a major issue, where children born from unofficial marriages often do not have a birth certificate stating the father's name, thus hindering basic rights such as guardianship, inheritance, and access to education (Rahbari, 2022). Women also become the most vulnerable group, as unregistered marriages do not provide legal protection in cases of divorce or neglect (Nugroho, 2021). Moreover, the social stigma attached to the children and mothers from unofficial marriages creates significant psychosocial impacts, affecting the quality of family life in the long term.

This condition is exacerbated by the information gap and low legal literacy in society. Many citizens do not understand the marriage registration process and consider it complicated or expensive, when in fact the official costs are relatively affordable. The

community also lacks awareness that marriage registration provides clear legal protection, not only for the couple but also for the children who will be born from the marriage. This low legal literacy makes the socialization and guidance carried out by the Religious Affairs Office very important and strategic (Tuhfatussamiyah, 2025).

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach to deeply understand the role of KUA Meral District's guidance in minimizing the practice of unregistered marriages through seminar and counseling activities. This approach was chosen because it allows for a more comprehensive data exploration regarding the processes, challenges, and outcomes of the guidance activities conducted directly for the community. The research location is within the working area of KUA Meral District, Karimun Regency, which includes several sub-districts with heterogeneous socio-cultural characteristics.

The implementation of the coaching is carried out through educational seminars specifically designed for engaged couples, couples of reproductive ages, community leaders, as well as representatives from youth and parents. This seminar aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the urgency of marriage registration, the social and legal risks of unregistered marriages, and solutions that comply with religious and positive law. The seminar activity lasts for a full day using interactive methods, including presentations, question-and-answer sessions, and group discussions. The main topics cover the legal basis of marriage according to Law Number 1 of 1974 and the Compilation of Islamic Law (KHI), the role of KUA in family services and coaching, as well as the social impacts of unregistered marriages.

Data collection for the research was conducted through three main techniques. First, participatory observation during the seminar to observe interactions, participant responses, and the effectiveness of material delivery. Second, in-depth interviews with seminar speakers, religious counselors, and some participants to determine their level of understanding and impressions of the material presented. Third, documentation study of the KUA archives, including data on the number of official marriages, early marriages, and pregnancies out of wedlock as contextual analysis material.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, by grouping the information into themes such as the effectiveness of the seminar, obstacles encountered, and recommendations for improvement. The validity of the data is strengthened through triangulation techniques, which compare the results of observations, interviews, and official documents.

This seminar approach not only serves as a means of data collection but also acts as a real intervention in raising public awareness. It is hoped that this method can become an effective model for sustainable development to reduce unofficial marriages in Meral District.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of a coaching seminar at the Meral District Office of Religious Affairs went smoothly and received high enthusiasm from the community. This event was attended by 50 participants consisting of prospective brides and grooms, fertile-age couples, community leaders, teenagers, and parents. Participants showed great interest in the discussion topics, as evidenced by their active questioning,

discussing, and sharing personal experiences.

The results of data analysis from observations, interviews, and documentation indicate that this seminar has a positive impact on increasing participants' knowledge about the urgency of marriage registration, the social and legal risks of unregistered marriages, as well as the role of the Office of Religious Affairs in fostering harmonious families.

Understanding of the participants

In general, participants showed a significant improvement in understanding after attending the seminar. This is evident from the way they answered questions, provided responses during discussions, and related the material to their personal experiences.

- a. Legal awareness has increased – participants understand that marriage registration provides certainty and legal protection for couples, children, and families.
- b. Perception of costs has changed – many participants who initially thought the registration fees were expensive now realize that the official fees are relatively affordable and the procedures are simple.
- c. Understanding of social risks has increased – participants are beginning to understand the negative impact of unregistered marriages on children's status, inheritance rights, and social stigma.
- d. The role of KUA is understood more broadly – participants now see KUA not just as a marriage registration institution, but also as a partner in family guidance that can help provide solutions.

This comparison can be seen in the table below;

Table 1. Level of Understanding of Participants Before and After the Seminar

Aspects of understanding	Sebelum (%)	Sesudah (%)
The importance of marriage registration	40	85
Social and legal risks of unregistered marriages	35	80
Procedures for marriage registration	30	75
The role of KUA in family guidance	45	88

Source: Author (2025)

Before the seminar, most participants only understood the religious aspect of marriage, without realizing the importance of the legal aspect. After the seminar, there was an increase in understanding across all aspects, particularly regarding the urgency of marriage registration and the social risks of unregistered marriages.

Obstacles during the activity

Although the seminar went smoothly and received positive feedback, there were several obstacles that reduced the effectiveness of the training activities. These obstacles indicate that the approach taken still needs strengthening, both from internal and external sides.

- a. Human Resource Limitations

The limited number of religious counselors at the KUA Meral Sub-district becomes a major obstacle. With participants reaching 50 people, the counselors

cannot provide sufficient in-depth support or personal consultations. Some participants who want to ask about specific cases or share personal experiences do not receive adequate time. This situation indicates the need for additional counselors or the involvement of volunteers with competence in family law education.

b. Minimal Facilities

Limitations of facilities, such as digital presentation media, insufficient seminar room space, and a lack of learning modules, are also obstacles. As a result, interactions become less optimal, and visual materials that should help participants understand legal concepts cannot be delivered effectively. This condition indicates the need for the procurement of more adequate supporting facilities, including audio-visual equipment, representative spaces, and printed or digital materials that participants can take home.

c. Culture and Social Views

Some participants still believe that siri marriage is a more practical choice and aligns with local customs. This view is rooted in cultural norms and the influence of previous generations who consider marriage registration as not very important. This cultural barrier makes the guidance messages delivered in the seminar not fully accepted, especially by older participants. To overcome this barrier, a more persuasive and culturally-based approach is needed, involving community and religious leaders as key mediators.

d. Low Legal Literacy

The low legal literacy of participants is also a significant obstacle. Some participants struggle to understand legal terms and administrative procedures conveyed by the speakers. For example, when discussing inheritance rights or birth certificates, many participants do not understand the broader legal implications. This indicates the need for the material to be presented in simpler language, accompanied by relevant real-life case examples.

e. Limited Collaboration

Another barrier is the lack of cross-sector collaboration. The minimal publication of activities results in not all layers of society being aware of the existence of this seminar. The limited involvement of schools, community health centers, and village officials makes the participant reach suboptimal. In fact, cross-sector synergy has great potential to expand the scope of socialization and strengthen educational messages. This barrier indicates the need for a collaborative forum that integrates various parties in the effort to prevent unregistered marriages in Meral District.

Action Plan

The results of the group discussion held during the final session of the seminar produced several action plans that are deemed most relevant and realistic to implement in Meral District. These steps are designed so that the coaching carried out does not stop at the seminar activities but evolves into a sustainable program that involves various parties.

- a. Identity polarization in the digital space has become one of the main challenges in strengthening moderate religious literacy among Muslim Gen-Z students in

Tangerang City. This polarization is characterized by the fragmentation of religious narratives into two extreme poles: a very conservative one with an exclusive tendency, and a very liberal one with a deconstructive approach to teachings. In between these two poles, moderate or wasatiah narratives often get submerged and lack sufficient exposure in the digital space. Gen-Z students in Tangerang City, like other urban students, have a very high level of digital connectivity. Preliminary surveys show that more than 94% of students use social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube to access religious content. However, most of the religious content they consume comes from algorithms that reinforce echo chambers, which is

b. Digitalization of Education

The second step agreed upon is to utilize digital technology as a broader and more effective educational medium. Short content based on social media, such as educational videos lasting 1–3 minutes, infographics, or short podcasts, is considered important to reach the younger generation active on digital platforms. In addition, dedicated WhatsApp or Telegram groups for families and teenagers are also planned as means of sharing information, tips, and announcements for upcoming training activities. This strategy is expected to create continuous two-way communication between KUA and the community.

c. Contextual Cultural Approach

Participants also emphasize the necessity of a culturally-based approach in every coaching program. Involving local customary leaders, religious figures, and youth is considered effective to bridge legal messages with strong local values. For example, outreach can be packaged in the form of routine study circles, customary discussions, or local cultural events, so that the community does not feel that the coaching is 'imposing' rules, but rather respects and reinforces existing local wisdom. This approach not only enhances the acceptance of the message but also builds trust between the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) and the community.

d. Cross-Sector Collaboration

The final plan is to establish a cross-sector collaboration forum that involves the Marriage Affairs Office (KUA), schools, community health centers (puskesmas), village officials, and community organizations. This forum serves to design, implement, and evaluate an integrated development program. Schools can play a role in educating adolescents about marriage readiness and family law literacy, while puskesmas can provide information related to reproductive health, and village officials can assist in publicizing and mobilizing the community to participate in development activities. This synergy is expected to create a stronger ecosystem in prevention.



Figure 1. Follow-up Action Plan for Development Through Activity
Source: Author (2025)

CONCLUSION

The guidance activities through seminars conducted by the KUA of Meral Sub-district have proven to have a positive impact on increasing public understanding of the urgency of marriage registration and the risks posed by unregistered marriages. Evaluation data shows that the level of awareness among participants regarding the importance of marriage registration significantly increased, from an average of 40% before the seminar to over 80% after the event. Participants also began to understand that official marriage is not only an administrative obligation but also a legal protection that guarantees the rights of the husband, wife, and children.

Nevertheless, this development has not yet fully effectively changed the behavior of society as a whole. Internal barriers, such as limitations in human resources and infrastructure, as well as external barriers, such as the strong influence of culture and low legal literacy, remain major challenges. This situation indicates that development needs to be carried out continuously with a more adaptive, persuasive, and cross-sectoral collaborative approach.

The follow-up plan produced in the group discussion offers a comprehensive strategy, ranging from strengthening the capacity of extension workers, utilizing digital media as an educational tool, a contextual cultural approach involving community leaders and youth, to the establishment of a cross-sector forum to support the sustainability of the program. Consistent implementation and periodic evaluation of this strategy will be key to gradually reducing the practice of unregistered marriages in Meral District.

Thus, the guidance by KUA not only serves as a short-term intervention but also as a foundation to build legal awareness, strengthen family resilience, and create a more orderly social system in accordance with religious and state laws. If these efforts are carried out systematically and involve all components of society, then the issue of unregistered marriages, which has been a social and legal challenge, can be significantly reduced in the future. Despite digital limitations, lack of policy support, and the absence of a strong sustainability structure, this activity has opened up space for positive

transformation. Therefore, efforts in wasatiyah religious literacy need to be continuously developed in a collaborative and systematic manner to create an ecosystem of education that is tolerant, peaceful, and civilized among the younger generation.

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The same award is also given to all seminar participants, including prospective brides and grooms, couples of reproductive age, community leaders, youth, and parents, who have actively participated with a spirit of learning, discussion, and providing constructive input. Sincere thanks are also extended to the local government of Karimun Regency, schools, and local health centers, which have supported the publicity of the activities and helped mobilize the community to attend this seminar. Additionally, appreciation is given to all organizing teams and volunteers who have worked with full dedication to ensure that each series of activities runs smoothly and provides real benefits.

May all contributions and cooperation established in this activity become a charitable act that brings blessings, not only for the people of Meral District but also serves as an inspiration for strengthening family guidance that is better and sustainable in the future.

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