

Study of Sae Dating Program in Improving Marriage Readiness Based on Law and Religious Teachings

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ABSTRACT

The “Kencan Sae” program is an innovative initiative by the Blitar City Government to assist unmarried individuals through premarital socialization and matchmaking. This study uses a descriptive qualitative method with data collection through in-depth interviews and field observations. The results of the study show that the program has been routinely implemented since April 2025 in various public facilities with material on mental and social readiness and the legal and religious values of marriage. The program is in line with the Marriage Law (No. 1/1974 jo. No. 16/2019) and Islamic teachings that emphasize physical, mental, and economic readiness before marriage. Participants generally appreciated the effectiveness of this program, although challenges such as participant awareness and resource limitations emerged as obstacles. Based on the findings, it was concluded that Kencan Sae can improve the legal and religious readiness of prospective brides and grooms and has the potential to reduce the rate of early marriage. Recommendations were made to expand outreach and strengthen cross-sector support to maximize the program's impact.

Keywords: *Marriage Readiness; Kencan Sae Program; Marriage Law; Religious Teachings; Pre-Marital Education*

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INTRODUCTION

An ideal marriage, from a legal and religious perspective, requires comprehensive preparation. Marriage Law No. 1 of 1974 (amended by Law No. 16/2019) requires a minimum age of 19 for both parties. According to this law, adulthood is assumed to be the age at which a person is capable of assuming the responsibilities of husband or wife. However, studies show that despite the existence of legal regulations, the practice of early marriage (under 18 years of age) remains high in Indonesia (BPS, 2022). From an Islamic perspective, the Quran and Hadith emphasize that couples must be physically, mentally, and financially prepared before marriage. For example, Surah An-Nur, verse 33, directs those who are unable to do so to restrain themselves until Allah grants them the ability. Furthermore, marriage in Islam is a sacred act of worship; the Prophet Muhammad

emphasized that marriage is sunnah, but there are still mandatory conditions that must be met to protect the welfare of the community.

The concept of marital readiness is also supported by studies of family management. Premarital guidance is defined as a preventive measure that provides prospective brides and grooms with knowledge, skills, and religious understanding to better prepare them for married life (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2019). The focus of this guidance material includes psychological preparation, interpersonal communication, reproductive health, family finances, and an understanding of rights and obligations in marriage. Ramadhani and Ramdani (2022) found that premarital training oriented toward religion and psychology can improve the mental readiness of prospective couples, thereby hopefully reducing the risk of postmarital conflict. Therefore, programs like Kencan Sae, which combines partner search with premarital education, are based on the theory that holistic interventions based on law and religion can strengthen family resilience before marriage.

Early marriage and domestic conflict remain serious problems in Indonesia. Statistics Indonesia (BPS) data (2022) shows that approximately 10.5% of marriages in Indonesia occur at a young age, and UNICEF (2021) even ranks Indonesia fourth in the world with 25.53 million women married before the age of 18. In fact, the Marriage Law (No. 1/1974 jo. No. 16/2019) requires a minimum age of 19 for prospective brides and grooms and other psychological and social readiness. It is in this context that the Blitar City Government launched the Mayor's 100-day work program in the form of the "Kencan Sae" (Controlling the Desire to Find a Partner in a Sharia-compliant, Safe, and Economical Manner) program as an effort to provide premarital assistance and find a sharia-compliant partner. This program not only serves as a forum for introducing singles, widows, and widowers, but also provides marriage readiness education covering mental, social, and religious law aspects. This innovation is crucial because many couples marry without adequate understanding of married life, which then makes them vulnerable to divorce and family problems. This trend has drawn government attention, necessitating an empirical study to assess the effectiveness of Kencana Sae in increasing marital readiness within a legal framework and religious teachings.

Marriage is viewed as a social institution and a sacred religious practice, regulated by state law. Sociologically, marriage is a legally and religiously recognized commitment to establish a family. Therefore, marital readiness must address various aspects: physical, mental, emotional, and economic readiness, as well as an understanding of the rights and obligations of husband and wife according to law and religion (Soekanto, 2010). Premarital guidance theory states that premarital counseling (premarital socialization) as a preventive intervention can improve the readiness of prospective brides and grooms by providing basic knowledge and skills (Qardhawi, 2005). This concept aligns with Islamic teachings, which emphasize the importance of physical, mental, and financial readiness for those contemplating marriage. The Kencana Sae program integrates this theory with Sharia values (e.g., refraining from marriage if not yet capable) and positive legal provisions (a minimum

age of 19 years and psychosocial readiness). Therefore, this study is based on a theoretical framework for implementing premarital counseling based on legal and religious education.

This study offers a novel approach by focusing on evaluating a local government program that combines legal and religious aspects in premarital education. While numerous studies have addressed early marriage and premarital education in general, no studies have focused on the "Kencan Sae" program in Blitar City. This study not only assesses the program's practical implementation but also examines the extent to which its approach is consistent with the national legal framework and Islamic religious values. This is crucial because the program adopts an innovative sharia marriage model (and provides free marriage facilities), while simultaneously targeting a reduction in early marriage rates and strengthening family resilience. Therefore, this study has the potential to provide concrete policy recommendations for strengthening similar programs in other regions.

Based on the background and theories that have been described, the formulation of the research problem is: (1) How is the implementation of the Kencan Sae program in increasing marriage readiness in Blitar City? (2) To what extent is this program in line with positive legal provisions and religious teachings? (3) What are the challenges and opportunities in implementing the program? (4) What are the participants' perceptions of the program's effectiveness? (5) To what extent is the program able to reduce the number of early marriages and family problems?

This study aims to describe the implementation of the Kencana Sae program in Blitar City and evaluate its effectiveness in improving community marital readiness. Specifically, this study aims to measure the program's compliance with the provisions of the Marriage Law and Islamic teachings, identify challenges and opportunities in program implementation, analyze participant perceptions of the program, and assess the program's potential to reduce early marriage and family problems in Blitar City.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to comprehensively portray the implementation and impacts of the *Kencana Sae Program* (Sugiyono, 2017; Azwar, 2012). The focus was on capturing natural social and cultural dynamics without manipulating variables. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews (Moleong, 2018) with key informants including local government officials, program organizers, and participants selected purposively based on their relevance to the study. The interview guide contained open-ended questions on participants' backgrounds, motivations, and perceptions of premarital education. Researchers also conducted participant observation during several program sessions to directly record interactions, delivery methods, and participant engagement. Observation notes included both descriptive and reflective elements to capture verbal and non-verbal aspects of participation.

Complementary data were obtained through document analysis, including government proposals, premarital education materials, committee reports, and media articles related to the program. Photos and videos were also reviewed to understand the

program's contextual and procedural details. Document analysis helped verify the consistency between program design and field implementation while supporting data triangulation cross-checking information across different data sources and collection techniques to strengthen validity.

After all data were collected, thematic analysis was conducted inductively to identify recurring patterns and key themes. Interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were coded and categorized into broader themes such as financial readiness, family support, and social engagement. The findings were described narratively and supported by direct informant quotations. Credibility was enhanced through triangulation and member checking, where selected informants reviewed interview summaries to confirm the accuracy of interpretations. These steps ensured that the conclusions reflected participants' authentic perspectives and the real implementation context of the *Kencana Sae Program*.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

RESEARCH RESULT

Implementation of the Sae Dating Program in Increasing Marriage Readiness

The Kencana Sae program was launched by the Blitar City Government in April 2025 as one of the Mayor's 100-day priorities. This activity is held regularly every month in public cafes in Blitar City at night, aiming to bring together unmarried residents and provide premarital guidance. In its implementation, the City Government provides two main components: (a) a sharia "dating" session to introduce participants, and (b) a premarital education session on the importance of mental, social, and spiritual readiness for marriage. The uniqueness of this program lies in the provision of free marriage facilities for couples formed through Kencana Sae, including the use of official AG-1 vehicles and the implementation of the marriage contract free of charge.

Table 1 shows the characteristics of the 100 program participants (May 2025 edition). The majority of participants were aged 20–25 (50%), with 60% male and 40% female. Most were single (80%), while the remaining 20% were widows/widowers. Participants were divided into groups based on age to facilitate interaction and discussion. Each meeting featured professional speakers (legal practitioners, religious counselors, family psychologists) who discussed topics such as husband-wife communication, reproductive health, family economics, and legal rights and obligations within a family. According to the organizers, the interactive approach went smoothly and the response from participants was very positive: most participants stated that the material provided new insights into marriage readiness. The program's implementation demonstrated synergy between the educational aspects (legal and religious materials) and the social aspects (meeting facilitation) in preparing participants for marriage.

Table 1. Characteristics of Participants in the Sae Dating Program in Blitar City (N = 100)

Variables	Category	Frequency
Gender	Man	60
	Woman	40
Age	20–25 years	50
	26–30 years	35
	31–35 years	15
Marital status	Single (never married)	80
	Widow/Widower	20

Program Compliance with Positive Law and Religious Teachings

A suitability analysis shows that the Kencana Sae concept aligns with legal and religious frameworks. From a positive legal perspective, the program supports the spirit of the Marriage Law, which mandates that prospective brides and grooms be prepared before marriage. For example, the program materials explicitly emphasize the importance of minimum age and financial preparation, as mandated by Law 16/2019. Most participants reported gaining an understanding of legal marriage requirements, such as age limits and complete documentation.

Within the context of Islam, Kencana Sae applies the values emphasized by the Quran and Hadith regarding marriage. The program emphasizes that marriage is a noble act of worship that requires total preparation, in line with Islamic teachings that direct prospective brides and grooms to prepare physically, mentally, and financially. For example, the premarital discussion cites Surah An-Nur, verse 33, which instructs those who are not yet capable to restrain themselves until they attain the ability. The sharia-compliant approach to dating (without casual courtship) also reflects religious values. Thus, Kencana Sae integrates legal education and religious teachings, providing a normative foundation for participants. This is consistent with the literature stating that comprehensive marriage preparation, including an understanding of religious law and teachings, can foster a harmonious family.

Challenges and Opportunities in Program Implementation

Several challenges emerged in the implementation of Kencana Sae. Based on interviews with organizers, the main obstacles included the program's relatively small budget, the tight schedule of activities combined with participants' work schedules, and cultural resistance among certain groups. For example, some parents remain skeptical about the concept of "dating," even though it is packaged in accordance with Islamic law, so further outreach needs to be improved. Furthermore, some participants' awareness of the importance of premarital education was initially low, as found in Zarkasyi's (2023) study at the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA), which demonstrated low awareness among prospective brides and grooms of the importance of marriage guidance.

On the other hand, Kencana Sae presents a strategic opportunity. Full support from regional leaders and local media has created positive momentum and widespread publicity.

The program also builds cross-sector networks by involving the Religious Affairs Office (KUA), the Community Empowerment Institution (LPMK), and religious organizations to expand its reach. This multifaceted approach aligns with the recommendations of various studies on programs to reduce early marriage, which emphasize the collaborative role of local governments and religious institutions. If the aforementioned challenges can be addressed, for example through increased budgeting and facilitator training, the program's potential to have a greater impact on public awareness will be greatly enhanced.

Participants' Perceptions of Program Effectiveness

Interviews with participants in the Kencana Sae program revealed that the majority greatly appreciated the program. Approximately 85% of respondents stated that the premarital materials provided a better understanding of the meaning and demands of marriage. For example, Ratih (25 years old, student) said:

"After joining Kencana Sae, I feel I understand better what to prepare for before marriage, especially religious rules and state laws." (Interview, 2025).

Ratih's opinion reinforces the finding that participants felt mentally and administratively prepared before marriage, especially after receiving legal and religious information. Other respondents also mentioned the benefits of legal and religious materials in wedding planning. Budi (30 years old, civil servant) explained:

"The marriage law material really helped us understand what documents and procedures needed to be prepared. I felt more at ease planning my wedding because I knew the religious rules." (Interview, 2025).

Budi's review showed that deepening legal knowledge helps prospective brides and grooms avoid administrative errors and fulfill their religious obligations during marriage. Furthermore, many participants appreciated the combination of socialization and matchmaking within Kencana Sae. Sinta (22, a student) stated:

"The combination of materials and matchmaking activities gave us not only theoretical knowledge but also practical communication experience. I learned a lot about how to adapt to partners from different backgrounds." (Interview, 2025).

Sinta's experience confirms that direct interaction in practical "matchmaking" provides new perspectives on communication and roles within a couple, in line with the positive perceptions of other participants. This finding is consistent with previous research. For example, the results of Putri et al.'s (2024) study in Aceh showed that premarital counseling significantly helped prospective brides and grooms understand their duties and roles within the household. Thus, the experiences of Kencana Sae participants align with

literature reviews that emphasize the importance of comprehensive marriage counseling to better prepare prospective brides and grooms for married life.

However, several participants also provided input for improving the material. Dini (24 years old, elementary school teacher) stated:

"While overall it was helpful, I wish there was a specific module on resolving marital conflict. That material is important so we can be prepared to handle future disagreements." (Interview, 2025).

This early suggestion highlights the need for in-depth study of domestic conflict, in line with international research showing that basic premarital education needs to be supplemented with practical aspects of conflict management. Agung (29, self-employed) expressed a similar sentiment:

"I think Kencan Sae needs to add a session on household financial planning so we can manage our family budget from the start of our marriage." (Interview, 2025).

Agung's input on finances emphasized the importance of adding practical modules tailored to the needs of young couples. The participants' views and suggestions emphasized that while the Kencan Sae premarital program already provides a good foundation, there is room for improvement in the curriculum. Thus, these interviews reinforce the point that marriage guidance must continue to be developed to be more applicable to the real-life context of prospective couples.

The Impact of the Program in Reducing Early Marriage Rates and Family Problems

Most of the participants were of the opinion that *Sae's Date* has the potential to encourage delaying marriage until couples are truly ready. Around 70% of respondents stated they would consider religious advice and financial readiness before marrying. This increased awareness is relevant to reducing child marriage, which remains significant in Indonesia. For example, national data shows that each year, around 10.5% of marriages in Indonesia involve one party under the age of 18 (Rahmayanti et al., 2024). More broadly, a recent study estimates that around one in five Indonesians marry as children (Rohmah, 2024). Through premarital education, such as *Sae's Date*, participants reported a greater understanding of the social and economic risks of premature marriage (e.g., school dropout, poverty, health complications).

While the long-term impact on early marriage statistics cannot be measured at this time, the literature supports this educational goal. Setyanto et al. (2022) stated that premarital education in Indonesia is designed as an effort to combat early marriage and domestic violence. By raising awareness of the importance of preparedness and the socio-economic dimensions of marriage, the program is expected to make a long-term positive contribution. Overall, *Sae's Date* it is hoped that this will strengthen family resilience in the

future and reduce the number of early marriages in the Blitar region, in line with the broader goals of premarital education.

DISCUSSION

Relevance of the Program to Premarital Education

The results of the study show that the implementation *Sae Dating Program* This aligns with previous theories and findings regarding the importance of premarital education in improving the preparedness of prospective brides and grooms. The descriptive qualitative approach used allowed researchers to explore participants' perceptions of their experiences during the program. Most participants considered this activity beneficial in broadening their understanding of the meaning and responsibilities of marriage, from a psychological, social, and spiritual perspective.

These findings support the research of Ramadan and Ramdani (2022), which demonstrated that premarital training based on religion and psychology can strengthen emotional readiness and awareness of couples' responsibilities. *hybrid* The program implemented in Kencana Sae combines social gathering sessions with premarital counseling, which has proven effective in reaching young people who tend to be less interested in formal counseling models like those at the KUA. Thus, this program is not only educational but also able to build relationships. *engagementsocial* participants through interactive activities.

Furthermore, the Kencana Sae implementation model aligns with recommendations from the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (Kemen PPPA), which emphasizes the need for cross-sectoral interventions in programs to improve family quality and prevent early marriage. This activity combines the roles of local governments, religious leaders, and community educators, creating a strong synergy between moral, social, and legal guidance in the context of marriage readiness.

Compliance with Law and Religious Teachings

Based on the results of interviews and documentation analysis, *Sae Dating Program* proven to be consistent with the provisions of Marriage Law No. 1 of 1974 because. No. 16 of 2019, particularly regarding the minimum age requirements for marriage and the importance of the bride and groom's readiness. Participants stated that the marriage law material helped them understand administrative procedures, the rights and obligations of couples, and the legal consequences of marriage. This knowledge strengthened the public's legal literacy and raised awareness of the importance of complying with state regulations.

From an Islamic perspective, Kencana Sae also aligns with sharia values, which emphasize comprehensive preparation before marriage. The premarital material presented by the speakers, such as the interpretation of Surah An-Nur verse 33 and the hadith on the perfection of faith through marriage, emphasizes the importance of mental, physical, and financial readiness. *Islamic dating* The methods implemented, namely limited interaction with supervision and Islamic etiquette, show that this program seeks to maintain the sanctity of pre-marital relationships according to religious principles.

This consistency addresses the research's second research question: the extent to which the program aligns with positive law and religious teachings. With a synergistic normative and empirical approach, Kencan Sae can be considered a form of social education innovation based on law and religious values.

Implementation Challenges and Strengthening Strategies

Field analysis revealed that the main challenges to implementing Kencan Sae included budget constraints, activity intensity, and low initial awareness among some participants regarding the importance of premarital education. These challenges were also identified by Zarkasyi (2023) in his research at the Mojokerto Office of Religious Affairs (KUA), who highlighted limited resources and facilitator competency as factors hindering the effectiveness of marriage guidance.

In the Blitar context, limited funding means that activities are still held periodically and dependent on local sponsorship. Furthermore, some residents still view the program as merely a dating platform, rather than an educational forum. These findings underscore the importance of public communication strategies and facilitator training to effectively convey educational messages.

As a strengthening strategy, this study recommends three steps:

1. increasing the capacity of facilitators through training based on family psychology and marriage law;
2. expanding cross-institutional collaboration networks such as the Social Services, Ministry of Religion, and religious organizations; and
3. Allocating sustainable budget support through family development programs at the regional level is expected to expand the program's reach and improve the quality of its implementation in the future.

Impact on Early Marriage Prevention and Family Resilience

One of the main objectives of this research is to analyze the potential *Sae Dating Program* in reducing early marriage rates and strengthening the preparedness of young families. Based on interview data, approximately 70% of participants stated that they would postpone marriage until they were financially and mentally ready after participating in this program. This awareness demonstrates that the program has succeeded in instilling the understanding that marriage is not simply fulfilling social demands but a decision that requires long-term responsibility.

These findings align with a study by Setyanto, Sugitanata, and Yazid (2022), which confirmed that premarital education in Indonesia has a preventive function in reducing child marriage and domestic violence. Thus, Kencan Sae has the potential to be an effective social intervention model in the context of family development at the regional level.

Synthesis and Theoretical Implications

Conceptually, the results of this study strengthen the theory of social intervention based on legal and religious values as the foundation for developing marital readiness. The

approach used shows that the effectiveness of premarital programs depends not only on the teaching materials but also on the students' attitudes. *relevance of cultural context, delivery methods, and local community involvement.*

By integrating educational elements (legal and religious knowledge) and interactive elements (social gatherings and simulated couple communication), Kencana Sae serves as a good example of a community-based premarital guidance model. Theoretically, these results reinforce the view that comprehensive premarital education can increase the preparedness of prospective brides and grooms, improve communication within the household, and prevent future family conflict (Putri, Jarnawi, & Muttaqin, 2024).

From a policy perspective, this program is also relevant for replication in other regions, with adjustments to the local socio-cultural context. Local governments can use Kencana Sae as a model. *good practice* in strengthening family resilience through synergy between positive law, religious values, and participatory social approaches.

CONCLUSION

The Kencana Sae program in Blitar City was successfully implemented as a combination of premarital counseling and Islamic matchmaking. This program has provided participants with a deeper understanding of aspects of marriage readiness from the perspective of positive law and Islamic teachings, as mandated by the Marriage Law and religious values. Despite resource constraints and participant awareness, participant perceptions indicate that the program is effective in increasing insight and motivating people to postpone marriage until maturity. Therefore, it is recommended that the City Government expand the socialization of Kencana Sae by involving more institutions (schools, Islamic boarding schools, and community organizations), as well as strengthening budget support and training for facilitators. It is hoped that ongoing evaluation and integration of this program into public policy (e.g., premarital schools) will maximize its impact in reducing early marriage rates and building more prepared families.

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