

International Journal Islamic Education, Research and Multiculturalism (IJIERM)

Available online https://journal.yaspim.org/index.php/IJIERM/index

Integration of Media Literacy in Religious Counseling for Preventing Early Marriage in Nias Barat

Ahmad Sampurna

Email: ahmadsampurna@uinsu.ac.id

State Islamic University of North Sumatra, Indonesia

Hasnun Jauhari Ritonga

Email: hasnunjauhariritonga@uinsu.ac.id

State Islamic University of North Sumatra, Indonesia

Hasnun Jauhari Ritonga

Email: arahman3005223001@uinsu.ac.id

State Islamic University of North Sumatra, Indonesia

Abstract: Early marriage remains a significant social challenge in Nias Barat, driven by cultural norms, economic pressures, and limited access to education. Religious counseling has long been a key strategy in addressing this issue, leveraging the influence of religious leaders to raise awareness about its risks. However, traditional counseling methods often fail to engage younger generations effectively, particularly in the digital era. This study explores the integration of media literacy into religious counseling as a transformative approach to preventing early marriage. Using a qualitative descriptive method with elements of Community-Based Research (CBR), data was collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and participatory observation involving religious counselors, parents, youth, and community leaders. The findings reveal that while religious counseling holds significant potential, its impact is limited by infrastructural, generational, and cultural barriers. Integrating media literacy offers opportunities to modernize these efforts, enhancing their relevance and reach. Community-based strategies that actively involve stakeholders in creating and disseminating culturally sensitive media content emerged as a promising approach. Despite challenges such as limited digital infrastructure and financial constraints, this integration fosters collaboration and ensures sustainability. This study contributes to the academic discourse on early marriage prevention by highlighting the importance of combining traditional practices with modern innovations. The results offer practical recommendations for policymakers and practitioners, providing a scalable model for similar contexts in Indonesia and beyond.

Keywords: Media Literacy, Religious Counseling, Early Marriage



1205

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

INTRODUCTION

Early marriage continues to pose significant challenges in Indonesia, particularly in remote regions such as Nias Barat. Statistics from the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) reveal that in 2023, 28% of all marriages in Nias Barat involved individuals below the legal age of marriage 1. This figure highlights the persistent prevalence of early marriage despite ongoing efforts to address it. While there was a notable decline in early marriage rates in 2022, the subsequent rise underscores the enduring influence of socio-cultural and economic factors. These statistics signal the pressing need for effective and sustainable interventions tailored to local contexts to combat this issue ². The consequences of early marriage extend beyond the individuals directly involved, impacting families and communities on multiple levels ³. Health-related risks are among the most severe, with young brides more likely to experience complications during pregnancy and childbirth. Socially, early marriage often leads to disrupted education, limiting personal growth and reducing opportunities for economic independence ⁴. Economically, this practice entrenches cycles of poverty, as young families often lack the skills and resources necessary for financial stability. Collectively, these factors exacerbate regional development disparities and hinder broader societal progress, making the prevention of early marriage a critical priority for local and national stakeholders.

⁴ S Suhardin et al., "Pengembangan Materi Pendidikan Agama Islam Berbasis Rumah," Edukasi (academia.edu, 2021); S DONA, KONSELING KELUARGA UNTUK MENCEGAH KRISIS KESENJANGAN HIDUP DI BALAI PENYULUH KB KECAMATAN TANJUNG SAKTI PUMU KABUPATEN ... (repository.radenintan.ac.id, 2022); S S Sarah, Penyuluhan Agama Dalam Kemodernan Dan Kebhinekaan (books.google.com, 2021).



¹ Barat, BPS Nias. "Nias Barat Dalam Angka." Badan Pusat Statistik, 2023, 32

² R Roslina, "Hubungan Pendidikan Dan Wilayah Tempat Tinggal Dengan Pernikahan Dini Pada WUS Di Provinsi Banten," *Jurnal Obstretika Scienta*, 2021; W Hafid, Z A Arda, and S Hanapi, "Pencegahan Pernikahan Usia Dini Melalui Penyuluhan Kesehatan Di Kelurahan Bolihuangga," *GLOBAL ABDIMAS: Jurnal ...*, 2021.

³ M Mursyid, *Pemberdayaan Masyarakat Berbasis Literasi* (books.google.com, 2019); N Sofyan and S Suciati, "Realizing Samawa Family Through Media Wisdom," *JCES* (Journal of Character Education ..., 2021.

Religious counseling has emerged as a promising strategy in addressing early marriage, particularly in regions where religious leaders hold significant influence. As trusted figures, religious counselors can educate communities on the adverse effects of early marriage and advocate for delaying marital commitments until individuals are physically and emotionally prepared. However, traditional methods of counseling often reliant on face-to-face interactions are increasingly insufficient in the digital era, where younger generations engage with information primarily through digital platforms. This calls for a modernized approach that integrates media literacy into religious counseling programs to enhance their effectiveness and reach. Media literacy, defined as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media, offers considerable potential as an educational tool. By equipping religious counselors with media literacy skills, they can utilize digital platforms to deliver targeted messages about the risks associated with early marriage. However, in Nias Barat, where only 35% of the population has reliable internet access, the practical implementation of media literacy-based interventions faces significant obstacles⁵. These challenges include not only infrastructural limitations but also the varying levels of digital proficiency among both counselors and community members.

Research on media literacy as a tool for educational and behavioral change has largely focused on urban settings with well-established internet infrastructure. Studies exploring its application in remote and resource-constrained areas like Nias Barat remain limited. This gap in the literature highlights the need for context-specific research that considers the unique challenges faced by rural communities. Specifically, how media literacy can be

⁶ Jawahir Thontowi et al., Aktualisasi Masyarakat Hukum Adat (MHA): Perspektif Hukum Dan Keadilan Terkait Dengan Status MHA Dan Hak-Hak Konstitusionalnya (Jakarta: Pusat Penelitian 1207



⁵ M Duke, "Community-Based Participatory Research," Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Anthropology, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190854584.001.0001/acrefore-9780190854584-e-225; S Atalay, "Can Archaeology Help Decolonize the Way Institutions Think? How Community-Based Research Is Transforming the Archaeology Training Toolbox and Helping to ...," Archaeologies, 2019, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11759-019-09383-6; M Murphy, W M Danis, and J Mack, "From Principles to Action: Community-Based Entrepreneurship in the Toquaht Nation," Journal of Business Venturing, 2020.

adapted to enhance the reach and impact of religious counseling in such settings remains an open question. Addressing this gap is essential for developing evidence-based strategies that are both effective and sustainable.⁷

The urgency of this study lies in the high prevalence of early marriage in Nias Barat and the inadequacy of existing approaches to fully address the problem. While religious counseling has proven effective in fostering community dialogue, its reach has been limited, particularly among the youth who are most at risk. Integrating media literacy into religious counseling can potentially overcome these barriers by leveraging digital tools to disseminate information more widely and engagingly. Such integration is particularly crucial in light of the generational shift in information consumption, where digital platforms increasingly dominate.8 This study introduces a novel approach by combining media literacy with religious counseling through a Community-Based Research (CBR) framework.9 This approach emphasizes the active involvement of local communities in the design, implementation, and evaluation of interventions, ensuring that strategies are culturally relevant and grounded in the realities of the target population. By fostering collaboration between religious counselors, local leaders, and community members, the study aims to create a holistic intervention model that addresses the multifaceted nature of early marriage.¹⁰

The study's objectives are twofold: first, to evaluate the effectiveness of integrating media literacy into religious counseling in preventing early marriage in Nias Barat, and second, to identify the challenges and opportunities

 $^{^{10}}$ N Suwarta et al., "Understanding the Role of the Environmental Arena and Community Social Structure in Stunting Prevention Education," *Academia* ..., 2023.



dan Pengkajian Perkara, Pengelolaan Teknologi Informasi dan Komunikasi Mahkamah Konstitusi Republik Indonesia, 2012).

⁷ Firmansyah, "Kesehatan Mental Islami Dalam Pendidikan Islam Menurut Perspektif Pemikiran Hasan Langgulung," *Analytica Islamica* 6, no. 1 (2013): 110–11.

⁸ HUBBIL KHAIR, "PERAN LEMBAGA PENDIDIKAN DALAM MASYARAKAT DI ERA MODERN," *Darul Ulum: Jurnal Ilmiah Keagamaan, Pendidikan Dan Kemasyarakatan* 12, no. 2 (2021), https://doi.org/10.62815/darululum.v12i2.67.

⁹ Marit Aas and Kirsten Foshaug Vennebo, "Building Leadership Capacity in School Leadership Groups: An Action Research Project," *Educational Action Research* 31, no. 2 (2023), https://doi.org/10.1080/09650792.2021.1934710.

encountered during its implementation.¹¹ The findings will contribute to the academic discourse on media literacy and its applications while providing actionable insights for policymakers and practitioners. By addressing the unique needs and constraints of rural communities, the study seeks to bridge the gap between theory and practice in early marriage prevention efforts. The novelty of this study lies in its emphasis on empowering religious counselors as agents of social change while simultaneously addressing infrastructural and digital literacy barriers. By equipping counselors with the tools and skills necessary to navigate the digital landscape, the study aims to enhance their capacity to engage with diverse audiences, particularly the youth. This dual focus on individual empowerment and systemic change sets the study apart from previous research, which has often overlooked the interplay between traditional counseling roles and modern communication technologies. Ultimately, this research seeks to develop a scalable intervention model that can be adapted to similar settings across Indonesia. By combining media literacy with religious counseling, the study offers a promising pathway for addressing early marriage in rural areas. Its findings will not only inform policy and program development in Nias Barat but also contribute to broader efforts to promote gender equity, educational access, and socio-economic resilience in vulnerable communities.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach combined with elements of Community-Based Research (CBR) to explore the integration of media literacy into religious counseling for preventing early marriage in Nias Barat. The qualitative approach was chosen to gain in-depth insights into the cultural, social, and infrastructural factors influencing the practice of early marriage ¹². CBR was

¹² Duke, "Community-Based Participatory Research"; Wa Ode Rayyani, Ainun Arizah, and Ahmad Abbas, "The Coaching Assistance of Preparing of Financial Statements Based on SAK EMKM Integrated [Asistensi Pembinaan Penyusunan Laporan Keuangan Berbasis SAK EMKM Yang Terintegrasi]," Proceeding of Community Development 2 (2019): 818, https://doi.org/10.30874/comdev.2018.193; Murphy, Danis, and Mack, "From Principles to Action: Community-Based Entrepreneurship in the Toquaht Nation"; C Harrington, S Erete, and 1209



¹¹ BPS Nias Barat, "Nias Barat Dalam Angka," BPS, 2023, 32.

incorporated to actively involve the local community, ensuring that the proposed interventions are relevant and sustainable. The study was conducted over six months, with a focus on religious counselors, local leaders, and community members in Nias Barat. Data collection was carried out using multiple techniques to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. These included in-depth interviews with religious counselors and local leaders, focus group discussions (FGDs) with youth and parents, and participatory observation during religious counseling sessions. Additionally, document analysis was performed to review local policies, religious guidelines, and previous studies related to early marriage. The combination of these methods allowed the study to triangulate data sources and validate findings.

Sampling was conducted purposively, targeting participants with direct relevance to the issue of early marriage and its prevention. Religious counselors were selected for their influence in the community and their role in delivering moral education. Parents and youth were included to capture perspectives from both generations, while local leaders provided insights into policy and cultural practices. In total, 20 participants were involved, including 8 religious counselors, 6 parents, and 6 youth. Efforts were made to ensure diversity in terms of age, gender, and geographic representation to reflect the broader context of Nias Barat. Data analysis followed the thematic analysis approach, allowing for the identification of recurring patterns and themes across the data. The analysis was conducted in several stages: data familiarization, coding, theme identification, and interpretation. Key themes included the challenges of integrating media literacy into traditional counseling methods, the effectiveness of hybrid approaches, and community receptiveness to proposed interventions. The findings were then synthesized to develop practical recommendations, aligning with the study's aim of producing culturally relevant and actionable strategies for preventing early marriage.

A M Piper, "Deconstructing Community-Based Collaborative Design: Towards More Equitable Participatory Design Engagements," *Proceedings of the ACM on Human ...,* 2019, https://doi.org/10.1145/3359318.



RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Role of Religious Counseling in Preventing Early Marriage

Religious counseling serves as a pivotal intervention in addressing early marriage in Nias Barat, primarily due to the significant influence religious leaders hold in shaping community norms and behaviors. Counselors provide guidance grounded in moral and ethical principles, emphasizing the long-term consequences of early marriage on personal development, family stability, and societal progress. By leveraging religious teachings, they are able to highlight values such as education, responsibility, and mutual respect, aligning their messages with both cultural and spiritual frameworks. This approach resonates strongly within the community, where religion often plays a central role in daily life. Despite its importance, religious counseling faces limitations in its current implementation. Most sessions are conducted in formal, structured settings that fail to engage younger audiences effectively. Interviews with counselors reveal that while their messages are well-received by parents and older generations, they struggle to connect with the youth, who are more influenced by peers and digital media. This generational disconnect reduces the overall impact of counseling efforts, as the younger demographic remains the most vulnerable to early marriage pressures.

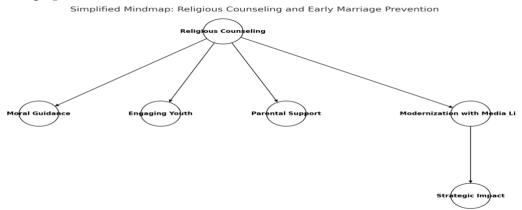


Figure 1. The Role of Religious Counseling in Preventing Early Marriage



This work is licensed under a <u>Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.</u>

Parents, on the other hand, are generally more receptive to religious counseling but often find themselves constrained by socio-economic factors and entrenched cultural expectations. While many parents acknowledge the risks associated with early marriage, they view it as a pragmatic solution to financial hardships or societal pressures. Counselors noted that addressing these underlying drivers is essential for creating lasting change, requiring a more comprehensive approach that extends beyond moral arguments to include practical support for families. The inconsistency of religious counseling programs in prioritizing early marriage prevention further diminishes their potential impact. Counselors reported that while the issue is often addressed in passing, it is rarely the focus of dedicated sessions or outreach initiatives. This lack of strategic emphasis underscores the need for more structured programs that equip counselors with the tools and resources to address early marriage comprehensively. Modernizing religious counseling through the integration of media literacy offers a promising solution to these challenges. By incorporating digital tools and platforms, counselors can reach broader audiences, particularly the youth, who are more likely to engage with visually appealing and interactive content. This hybrid approach bridges the gap between traditional methods and contemporary communication preferences, enhancing the relevance and effectiveness of counseling efforts. In summary, religious counseling remains a critical yet underutilized mechanism for addressing early marriage in Nias Barat. Strengthening its impact requires targeted strategies that adapt to the changing social landscape, particularly through the incorporation of innovative approaches like media literacy. Such efforts have the potential to transform counseling into a dynamic and effective tool for social change.

Challenges in Implementing Media Literacy in Religious Counseling

The integration of media literacy into religious counseling represents a transformative approach but is not without significant challenges. Limited digital infrastructure in Nias Barat poses a critical barrier to the successful implementation of media-based interventions. With only 35% of the population having reliable internet access, the feasibility of using digital platforms to 1212



disseminate counseling content remains constrained. This lack of access highlights the need for alternative solutions that blend offline and online strategies to ensure inclusivity. Counselors' limited familiarity with media literacy and digital tools further complicates the integration process. Many religious counselors in Nias Barat expressed enthusiasm for adopting new methods but reported feeling unprepared to navigate the complexities of media content creation and distribution. This gap in digital literacy underscores the importance of capacity-building programs that provide counselors with the skills and knowledge to effectively utilize digital platforms for their outreach efforts.

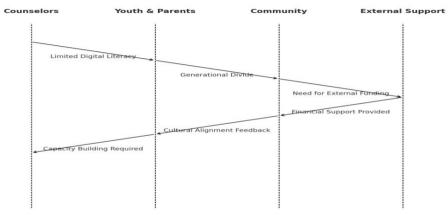


Figure 2. Challenges in Implementing Media Literacy in Religious Counseling

Community attitudes toward digital interventions also vary, creating additional challenges. Younger individuals generally exhibit a higher degree of openness to digital media, viewing it as a natural extension of their daily communication habits. However, older generations, including many parents, often regard media-based counseling with skepticism, perceiving it as less authentic compared to traditional, face-to-face interactions. This generational divide necessitates the development of multi-faceted approaches that cater to the preferences and expectations of diverse demographic groups. Cultural factors significantly influence the acceptance of media-based interventions. In Nias Barat, where traditional norms and values hold strong sway, any new approach must be carefully aligned with local cultural practices to avoid resistance. Tailoring media



content to reflect the community's unique identity and addressing their specific concerns is essential for fostering trust and buy-in from stakeholders.

Financial constraints represent another substantial challenge in implementing media literacy within religious counseling. Developing and disseminating high-quality media content requires significant resources, which are often beyond the reach of religious counseling programs operating in resource-limited settings. External support from government agencies, NGOs, or private sector partnerships is crucial for overcoming these financial barriers and ensuring the sustainability of digital initiatives. Despite these challenges, the potential for media literacy to revolutionize religious counseling is undeniable. Addressing the barriers through targeted training, community engagement, and resource mobilization can pave the way for more effective and inclusive interventions. By combining the strengths of traditional counseling with the innovative possibilities of media literacy, Nias Barat can develop a hybrid approach that addresses the complexities of early marriage prevention.

Community-Based Strategies for Preventing Early Marriage

Community-based approaches offer a robust framework for integrating media literacy into religious counseling while ensuring cultural relevance and sustainability. By actively involving local stakeholders, such as parents, youth, and community leaders, these strategies foster a sense of ownership and commitment to the intervention goals. The active participation of the community not only enhances the effectiveness of the programs but also ensures their alignment with local values and priorities, making them more likely to succeed in the long term. Parents, as key decision-makers in early marriage practices, play a crucial role in the success of these interventions. Focus group discussions revealed that parents are more inclined to support programs that respect cultural norms while highlighting the benefits of delaying marriage, such as improved educational and economic opportunities for their children. Programs that provide practical alternatives, like scholarships or skill development training, further strengthen parental support by addressing the root causes of early marriage.



Youth engagement is equally critical for the success of community-based strategies. The younger generation is often the primary target of early marriage prevention efforts, and their active involvement ensures that the interventions resonate with their interests and experiences. Encouraging youth to participate in the creation of media content, such as short videos or social media campaigns, not only amplifies their voices but also increases the reach and impact of the messages. Local leaders play a vital role in legitimizing and promoting the interventions within the community. Their endorsement provides credibility to the programs and helps to overcome resistance from conservative factions. Leaders also serve as key advocates for aligning early marriage prevention initiatives with broader community development goals, such as improving access to education and economic resources.

Pilot programs conducted as part of this study demonstrated the potential of community-based strategies to create meaningful change. Workshops that trained counselors, youth, and parents in basic media literacy skills led to the development of culturally relevant content addressing early marriage. These materials were disseminated through religious gatherings and local social media platforms, reaching diverse audiences and fostering community dialogue. Community-based strategies that integrate media literacy and religious counseling offer a powerful approach to preventing early marriage in Nias Barat. By fostering collaboration among stakeholders and tailoring interventions to the unique cultural and social contexts of the community, these strategies ensure sustainability and maximize their impact on reducing early marriage rates.

CONCLUSION

Religious counseling, as a deeply ingrained practice in Nias Barat, holds significant potential to address the persistent issue of early marriage. However, its traditional methods are increasingly inadequate in reaching and engaging younger generations, who are most vulnerable to this practice. Integrating media literacy into religious counseling offers a transformative approach to modernize these efforts, enabling counselors to effectively convey their messages through innovative and engaging digital platforms. By 1215



bridging the generational and communicative gaps, this integration can revitalize the role of religious counseling in promoting education, delaying marriage, and fostering long-term community development. The integration of media literacy into religious counseling faces several challenges, including limited digital infrastructure, gaps in counselors' digital skills, cultural sensitivities, and financial constraints. Addressing these barriers requires targeted capacity-building programs, community involvement, and resource mobilization. A community-based approach, which involves local stakeholders in the design and implementation of interventions, ensures cultural relevance and fosters a sense of ownership among participants. The active involvement of parents, youth, and community leaders in creating and disseminating media content can amplify the impact of these initiatives while ensuring their alignment with local values. Community-based strategies that incorporate media literacy and religious counseling represent a sustainable and culturally sensitive solution to early marriage in Nias Barat. By fostering collaboration among stakeholders, leveraging digital tools, and addressing root causes such as poverty and educational access, these interventions can create meaningful and lasting change. The findings of this study highlight the importance of integrating traditional practices with modern innovations, providing a scalable model for other regions facing similar challenges, and contributing to broader national efforts in reducing early marriage and promoting community resilience.

Bibliography

Aas, Marit, and Kirsten Foshaug Vennebo. "Building Leadership Capacity in School Leadership Groups: An Action Research Project." *Educational Action Research* 31, no. 2 (2023). https://doi.org/10.1080/09650792.2021.1934710.

Atalay, S. "Can Archaeology Help Decolonize the Way Institutions Think? How Community-Based Research Is Transforming the Archaeology Training Toolbox and Helping to" Archaeologies, 2019.



1216

https://doi.org/10.1007/s11759-019-09383-6.

- Barat, BPS Nias. "Nias Barat Dalam Angka." BPS, 2023, 32.
- DONA, S. KONSELING KELUARGA UNTUK MENCEGAH KRISIS KESENJANGAN HIDUP DI BALAI PENYULUH KB KECAMATAN TANJUNG SAKTI PUMU KABUPATEN repository.radenintan.ac.id, 2022.
- Duke, M. "Community-Based Participatory Research." Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Anthropology, 2020. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190854584.001.0001/acrefore-9780190854584-e-225.
- Firmansyah. "Kesehatan Mental Islami Dalam Pendidikan Islam Menurut Perspektif Pemikiran Hasan Langgulung." *Analytica Islamica* 6, no. 1 (2013): 110–11.
- Hafid, W, Z A Arda, and S Hanapi. "Pencegahan Pernikahan Usia Dini Melalui Penyuluhan Kesehatan Di Kelurahan Bolihuangga." *GLOBAL ABDIMAS: Jurnal ...*, 2021.
- Harrington, C, S Erete, and A M Piper. "Deconstructing Community-Based Collaborative Design: Towards More Equitable Participatory Design Engagements." *Proceedings of the ACM on Human ...,* 2019. https://doi.org/10.1145/3359318.
- KHAIR, HUBBIL. "PERAN LEMBAGA PENDIDIKAN DALAM MASYARAKAT DI ERA MODERN." Darul Ulum: Jurnal Ilmiah Keagamaan, Pendidikan Dan Kemasyarakatan 12, no. 2 (2021). https://doi.org/10.62815/darululum.v12i2.67.
- Murphy, M, W M Danis, and J Mack. "From Principles to Action: Community-Based Entrepreneurship in the Toquaht Nation." *Journal of Business Venturing*, 2020.
- Mursyid, M. Pemberdayaan Masyarakat Berbasis Literasi. books.google.com, 2019.
- Rayyani, Wa Ode, Ainun Arizah, and Ahmad Abbas. "The Coaching Assistance of Preparing of Financial Statements Based on SAK EMKM Integrated [Asistensi Pembinaan Penyusunan Laporan Keuangan Berbasis SAK EMKM Yang Terintegrasi]." *Proceeding of Community Development* 2 (2019): 818.



- https://doi.org/10.30874/comdev.2018.193.
- Roslina, R. "Hubungan Pendidikan Dan Wilayah Tempat Tinggal Dengan Pernikahan Dini Pada WUS Di Provinsi Banten." *Jurnal Obstretika Scienta*, 2021.
- Sarah, S S. Penyuluhan Agama Dalam Kemodernan Dan Kebhinekaan. books.google.com, 2021.
- Sofyan, N, and S Suciati. "Realizing Samawa Family Through Media Wisdom." *ICES (Journal of Character Education ...,* 2021.
- Suhardin, S, H Hayadin, S Sugiarti, and A Marlina. "Pengembangan Materi Pendidikan Agama Islam Berbasis Rumah." *Edukasi*. academia.edu, 2021.
- Suwarta, N, D Astutiek, E D Riyanto, and ... "Understanding the Role of the Environmental Arena and Community Social Structure in Stunting Prevention Education." *Academia* ..., 2023.
- Thontowi, Jawahir, Irfan Nur Rachman, Nuzul Qur'aini Mardiya, and Titis Anindyaj. *Aktualisasi Masyarakat Hukum Adat (MHA): Perspektif Hukum Dan Keadilan Terkait Dengan Status MHA Dan Hak-Hak Konstitusionalnya*. Jakarta: Pusat Penelitian dan Pengkajian Perkara, Pengelolaan Teknologi Informasi dan Komunikasi Mahkamah Konstitusi Republik Indonesia, 2012.