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THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS COUNSELORS IN STRENGTHENING INTERRELIGIOUS HARMONY IN TELUK PATIPI DISTRICT, FAKFAK REGENCY

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Abstract

*Religious counselors (*penyuluh agama*) play an important role in fostering religious life and maintaining interreligious harmony, particularly in Teluk Patipi District, Fakfak Regency, West Papua Province. This study analyzes the roles, strategies, and obstacles of religious counselors in strengthening religious moderation and social cohesion. It is a qualitative case study, with data collected through interviews, field observation, and documentation. The results show that religious counselors function not only as transmitters of religious teachings but also as agents of social transformation, acting as cultural mediators, moral educators, community facilitators, and peace agents when problems arise between religious communities. Their strategies comprise communicative, educational, social-practical, and adaptive approaches grounded in local wisdom, such as the philosophy of* Satu Tungku Tiga Batu *(one hearth, three stones). They nevertheless face structural, competence-related, and socio-ideological obstacles, including limited facilities, digital literacy challenges, and resistance to religious moderation. The study concludes that the success of religious counselors in multicultural societies depends on their ability to adapt to the local context, build effective communication, and apply inclusive counseling methods. Religious counselors are thus an important pillar in strengthening interreligious harmony, maintaining social cohesion, and building a faithful, virtuous, and harmonious society amid modernization and globalization.*
Keywords: *Religious Counselors, Interreligious Harmony, Social Mediator, Religious Moderation.*

Abstrak

Penyuluh agama berperan penting dalam membina kehidupan beragama dan menjaga kerukunan antarumat beragama, khususnya di Distrik Teluk Patipi, Kabupaten Fakfak, Provinsi Papua Barat. Penelitian ini menganalisis peran, strategi, dan hambatan penyuluh agama dalam memperkuat moderasi beragama dan kohesi sosial. Penelitian ini merupakan studi kasus kualitatif dengan data yang dikumpulkan melalui wawancara, observasi lapangan, dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penyuluh agama tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai penyampai ajaran agama, tetapi juga sebagai agen transformasi sosial yang berperan sebagai mediator budaya, pendidik moral, fasilitator masyarakat, dan agen perdamaian ketika muncul persoalan antarumat beragama. Strategi mereka meliputi pendekatan komunikatif, edukatif, sosial-praktis, dan adaptif yang berlandaskan kearifan lokal, seperti falsafah Satu Tungku Tiga Batu. *Namun, mereka menghadapi hambatan struktural, hambatan kompetensi, dan hambatan sosial-ideologis, termasuk keterbatasan sarana, tantangan literasi digital, dan resistensi terhadap moderasi beragama. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa keberhasilan penyuluh agama dalam masyarakat multikultural bergantung pada kemampuan mereka beradaptasi dengan konteks lokal, membangun komunikasi yang efektif, dan menerapkan metode penyuluhan yang inklusif. Dengan*

demikian, penyuluh agama merupakan pilar penting dalam memperkuat kerukunan antarumat beragama, menjaga kohesi sosial, dan membangun masyarakat yang beriman, berakhlak mulia, dan harmonis di tengah modernisasi dan globalisasi.
Kata Kunci: *Penyuluh Agama, Kerukunan Antarumat Beragama, Mediator Sosial, Moderasi Beragama.*


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INTRODUCTION

Religious counselors (*penyuluh agama*) hold a strategic position as the spearhead of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in providing religious guidance and services to the community.[1] Their role is not limited to conveying religious teachings; they also act as social movers who safeguard the moral, spiritual, and cultural values of society. In the modern era, marked by the development of information and communication technology, religious counselors are expected to possess adequate digital literacy to disseminate their messages effectively through social media, podcasts, and other digital platforms. Beyond digital competence, they remain responsible for the moral and spiritual development of the community, instilling good character, raising religious awareness, and strengthening the character of society through continuous counseling activities. The integration of religious, social, and digital skills makes religious counselors public figures who contribute to national character building as agents of peace and religious moderation, motivators, mediators, and social facilitators.[2]

Fakfak Regency, West Papua Province, is known for its high degree of ethnic and religious plurality, reflecting the diversity of Indonesian society. Its residents live side by side peacefully despite differences of ethnicity and religion, including Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism.[3] The local cultural philosophy of *Satu Tungku Tiga Batu* (one hearth, three stones), which emphasizes unity, tolerance, and mutual respect among religious communities, underpins peaceful daily life. Interreligious harmony in Teluk Patipi District, however, still faces complex challenges, including differences in religious understanding and interpretation, exclusive attitudes, and a limited understanding of religious moderation. The influence of social media, the dynamic relationship between custom (*adat*) and religion, limited access to coastal areas, and the lack of

[1] Wiwin Asmawiyah, "Peran Penyuluh Agama dalam Memotivasi Kepala Keluarga untuk Mencari Nafkah di Kabupaten Majalengka," *Jurnal Penyuluhan Agama* 9, no. 1 (2022): 99, https://doi.org/10.15408/jpa.v9i1.24662.

[2] Nur Syam, "Humanist Proselytizing in Disruptive Era," in *Proceedings of the International Conference on Da'wa and Communication (ICONDAC)* (Surabaya: UIN Sunan Ampel, 2022).

[3] Saidin Ernas and Zuly Qodir, "Agama dan Budaya dalam Integrasi Sosial (Belajar dari Pengalaman Masyarakat Fakfak di Propinsi Papua Barat)," *Jurnal Pemikiran Sosiologi* 2, no. 2 (2017), https://doi.org/10.22146/jps.v2i2.30015.

sustained interfaith dialogue also have the potential to disrupt harmony. A land dispute in Teluk Patipi District in 2022, for example, revealed entrenched positions on both sides, with neither party willing to concede or to settle the matter through legal or religious mechanisms. Religious counselors, as the spearhead of community guidance, must therefore deal with social dynamics, cultural differences, and diverse religious perceptions; in this plural context, they serve as social unifiers, mediators of potential conflict, and transmitters of inclusive values to young people and the wider community.

Studies of interreligious harmony commonly measure it through three main indicators: tolerance, equality, and cooperation.[4] Tolerance means respecting and allowing positions, opinions, views, and beliefs that differ from one's own.[5] Equality reflects the willingness to protect one another and to grant equal rights and opportunities without asserting superiority, while cooperation describes active engagement with other groups and empathy and sympathy toward them in the social, economic, cultural, and religious spheres.[6] At a broader level, Husin, drawing on Mukti Ali, describes the "trilogy of religious harmony," namely harmony within each religious community, harmony between religious communities, and harmony between religious communities and the government, which stresses mutual respect and cooperation in maintaining social harmony in plural Indonesian society.[7]

Previous studies have shown that religious counselors contribute to interreligious harmony through various means: as motivators of harmonious religious life,[8] through communication strategies that instill tolerance in interfaith forums and rural communities,[9] as agents of religious moderation,[10] and through the organization of religious counseling in urban

[4] Muhammad Yunus et al., "Indeks Kerukunan Umat Beragama Kota Lubuklinggau Tahun 2019," *Khabar: Jurnal Komunikasi Penyiaran Islam* 1, no. 1 (2019).

[5] Daud Alfons Pandie, "Konsep 'Satu Tungku Tiga Batu' Sosio-Kultural Fakfak sebagai Model Interaksi dalam Kehidupan Antarumat Beragama," *Societas Dei: Jurnal Agama dan Masyarakat* 5, no. 1 (2018), https://doi.org/10.33550/sd.v5i1.78.

[6] Yunus et al., "Indeks Kerukunan Umat Beragama."

[7] Khairah Husin, "Peran Mukti Ali dalam Pengembangan Toleransi Antar Agama di Indonesia," *Jurnal Ushuluddin* 21, no. 1 (2014), https://doi.org/10.24014/jush.v21i1.729.

[8] Marshela Anggreni et al., "Peran Penyuluh sebagai Motivator untuk Meningkatkan Kerukunan Hidup Beragama di Masyarakat," *Dawuh: Islamic Communication Journal* 4, no. 1 (2023), https://doi.org/10.62159/dawuh.v4i1.1072.

[9] Rizky Nuriah and Rini Laili Prihatini, "Strategi Komunikasi Penyuluh Agama Swadaya dalam Menanamkan Nilai Toleransi Antar Umat Beragama di Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama (FKUB) DKI Jakarta," *Jurnal Penyuluhan Agama* 9, no. 2 (2022), https://doi.org/10.15408/jpa.v9i2.26800; Muhammad Ali Nasir and Kun Wazis, "Strategi Komunikasi Penyuluh Agama Islam dalam Menjaga Toleransi Umat Beragama di Kecamatan Tempurejo Kabupaten Jember," *Maddah: Journal of Advanced Da'wah Management Research* 1, no. 2 (2022).

[10] Fathur Rohman and M. Syakur, "Penyuluh Agama sebagai Agen Moderasi Beragama: Studi Kasus di Kecamatan Rogojampi Kabupaten Banyuwangi," *Konseling At-Tawazun: Jurnal Kajian Bimbingan dan Konseling Islam* 4, no. 2 (2025), https://doi.org/10.35316/attawazun.v4i2.7735.

communities.[11] Studies of Fakfak, meanwhile, have highlighted the role of *Satu Tungku Tiga Batu* as a model of social integration and interreligious interaction.[12] Few studies, however, have examined how religious counselors work within this local philosophy in a remote coastal district such as Teluk Patipi, where geographical isolation, customary dynamics, and limited facilities shape their practice. This study fills that gap by analyzing the roles, strategies, and obstacles of religious counselors in strengthening interreligious harmony in Teluk Patipi District.

The role of religious counselors is all the more important in Teluk Patipi because of its archipelagic geography and the dispersal of the population across coastal villages. Counselors carry out not only formal religious duties but also act as social mediators, educators, guardians of local culture, and community facilitators. Their outreach includes guiding *majelis taklim* (religious study groups), Qur'anic education, guidance for harmonious families (*keluarga sakinah*), and counseling on religious moderation in schools and villages. Their strategies are educational, communicative, social-practical, and adaptive, grounded in local wisdom such as *Satu Tungku Tiga Batu*, a principle that has long informed social, religious, political, and economic life and has even become the basis of formal and institutional norms.[13] At the same time, they face structural, competence-related, and socio-ideological obstacles, including limited resources, limited digital literacy, resistance to religious moderation, and complex social and political dynamics. Because interreligious peace is a dynamic process that requires continuous maintenance, building a social environment conducive to peaceful coexistence requires collaboration between religious leaders, community leaders, local government, the community, and religious counselors.[14]

RESEARCH METHODS

This study used a qualitative approach to examine in depth the strategic role of religious counselors in fostering interreligious harmony in Teluk Patipi District, Fakfak Regency. The approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to understand complex social phenomena holistically, particularly the dynamics of relations in a multicultural society. Interreligious harmony was analyzed using three main indicators, namely tolerance, equality, and cooperation, which served as the analytical framework for developing the interview guide, conducting field observation, and categorizing and interpreting the findings. The informants were religious

[11] Abd. Shadiq Kawu, "Penyelenggaraan Kepenyuluhan Keagamaan pada Masyarakat Kota Pare-Pare," *Al-Qalam* 17, no. 2 (2011).

[12] Ernas and Qodir, "Agama dan Budaya dalam Integrasi Sosial"; Pandie, "Konsep 'Satu Tungku Tiga Batu'."

[13] Silvano Hajid, "'Satu Tungku Tiga Batu': Warisan Leluhur Fakfak di Papua yang 'Melampaui Toleransi' tetapi Dikritik Kalangan Muda," *BBC News Indonesia, 2024*, accessed July 31, 2025, https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/articles/c884jpl04nno.

[14] Anggreni et al., "Peran Penyuluh sebagai Motivator," 20.

counselors in Teluk Patipi District, a religious counselor at the regency level, and residents of Patipi Pasir Village. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, field observation, and the review of relevant documents. Data validity was ensured through triangulation of sources, techniques, and time. The data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, comprising data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification.[15]

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Role of Religious Counselors in Strengthening Interreligious Harmony

The Ministry of Religious Affairs relies heavily on religious counselors to provide religious guidance and community services. Besides teaching religion, they act as agents of social change by serving as community facilitators, cultural mediators, and moral educators.[16] This is consistent with the view, published by the Purbalingga Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, that religious counselors have a strategic function as agents of social transformation who must adapt to developments in information and communication technology,[17] and with the emphasis in *Penyuluh Agama Islam Melek Digital* on counselors' ability to respond to social change through the use of technology.[18] Alongside digital literacy, religious counselors remain the main actors in the moral and spiritual development of the community,[19] and through dialogical, inclusive, and locally grounded approaches they act as peacebuilders and agents of religious moderation who help prevent religiously motivated social conflict.[20]

This strategic role is clearly visible in Teluk Patipi District. Data from the Fakfak Regency Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs (2024) show that some 2,100 Muslims live scattered across islands and coastal settlements in the district, which illustrates the scale of the counselors' responsibility for providing religious guidance while maintaining social cohesion. Besides their formal religious duties, counselors act as social mediators, community educators, and guardians of the local cultural values that bind social life together. The Interreligious

[15] Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook* (2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994).

[16] Suryana Suryana and Nawari Ismail, "Strategi Penyuluhan Agama Islam dalam Pembinaan Keagamaan terhadap Majelis Taklim," *Al-Qalam: Jurnal Ilmiah Keagamaan dan Kemasyarakatan* 17, no. 5 (2023), https://doi.org/10.35931/aq.v17i5.2455.

[17] Joko Waluyo, "Peran Penyuluh Agama dalam Membangun Kerukunan dan Integritas Bangsa," *Kementerian Agama Kabupaten Purbalingga*, accessed July 31, 2025, https://purbalingga.kemenag.go.id/peran-penyuluh-agama-dalam-membangun-kerukunan-dan-integritas-bangsa/.

[18] Juli Armadhan Kurniawan and Rapiun, *Penyuluh Agama Islam Melek Digital* (Surabaya: Pustaka Media Guru, 2023), 14.

[19] Harun Suyanto and Nawari Ismail, "The Role of Islamic Extension Workers in the Spiritual Mental Development of Kalurahan Civil Service in Patuk District," *International Journal of Social Service and Research* 3, no. 10 (2023), https://doi.org/10.46799/ijssr.v3i10.440.

[20] Ihsan Ali-Fauzi et al., *Agama, Kerukunan, dan Binadamai di Indonesia: Modul Lokakarya Penyuluh Agama* (Jakarta: PUSAD Yayasan Wakaf Paramadina, 2018), 36.

Harmony Index (*Indeks Kerukunan Umat Beragama*, IKUB) for the district shows a positive trend, rising from 4.52 to 5.00 and placing harmony in the very high category. This achievement reflects the strong commitment of the government and the community to maintaining interreligious harmony, supported by the religious attitudes of the community, tolerance, equality, cooperation, and government policy, although social, political, and economic challenges continue to require attention.

The counselors' activities include guiding *majelis taklim*, Qur'anic education, mentoring for *keluarga sakinah*, and the dissemination of religious moderation in schools and villages. As one informant explained, religion is positioned as a way of life that governs not only ritual worship but also character, social ethics, and concern for the common good; this places counselors as transmitters of social morality and spiritual guides who strengthen the character and social cohesion of the community.[21] Overall, the role of religious counselors in Teluk Patipi reflects a combination of religious purpose, social responsibility, and technological adaptation: they act not only as transmitters of religious teachings but also as catalysts of social change, cultural intermediaries, moral guides, community organizers, and promoters of peace.

Strengthening Harmony through the Tolerance Indicator

Strengthening interreligious tolerance is one concrete manifestation of the counselors' role in Teluk Patipi. As moral educators, they instill the values of religious moderation, mutual respect, and acceptance of differences in belief. Through religious guidance, interactive dialogue, group discussions, and routine worship activities, they promote an inclusive understanding of religion that is open to diversity. Interviews and field observation show that dialogical and persuasive approaches are the main strategies for fostering tolerance. Counselors do not merely convey religious teachings normatively but relate them to the realities of a plural society, so that tolerance does not remain an abstract concept but is internalized in everyday social behavior.

Strengthening Harmony through the Equality Indicator

The equality indicator is reflected in the counselors' role as social mediators who uphold justice and the recognition of equal rights for all religious communities. They seek to reduce exclusivism and reject the superiority of any particular religion by emphasizing equality in social and religious life. Equality is further reinforced by integrating religious and customary values in Fakfak society. Customary practices such as *Apurisuman*, or "mouth washing," serve as a conflict-resolution mechanism that places all parties in an equal position, and counselors help

[21] Fifin Iba (resident of Patipi Pasir Village), interview by the author, Teluk Patipi, 2025.

direct such practices so that they accord with religious teachings, fostering social justice and mutual respect among religious communities.[22]

Strengthening Harmony through the Cooperation Indicator

Harmony is also strengthened through interfaith and inter-institutional cooperation. As community facilitators, counselors encourage active participation in collective activities such as mutual assistance (*gotong royong*), social activities, and family guidance, as well as collaboration with customary leaders, religious leaders, local government, and educational institutions. Such cooperation strengthens a sense of togetherness and shared responsibility for maintaining social harmony. The interviews indicate that interreligious collaboration is an important factor in creating a safe, peaceful, and conflict-free social environment; through spiritual guidance and inter-institutional cooperation, counselors function as agents of peace who contribute directly to social stability and interreligious harmony in Fakfak.[23]

Taken together, the role of religious counselors in Teluk Patipi cannot be separated from the integration of tolerance, equality, and social cooperation; the three indicators complement one another and form the foundation of sustainable harmony.[24] Counselors act not only as transmitters of normative teachings but also as social actors who bridge differences, manage potential conflicts, and foster a collective awareness of peaceful coexistence. Through dialogical, inclusive, and locally grounded approaches, they contribute to social harmony, community cohesion, and stable interreligious relations in the district.[25]

Strategies of Religious Counselors in Strengthening Interreligious Harmony

Building on the roles described above, this section analyzes the strategies applied by religious counselors in Teluk Patipi District. These strategies are understood not merely as a series of programs or activities but as a systematic approach designed to instill tolerance, equality, and cooperation among religious communities. The discussion is divided into two aspects: the strategic framework as the conceptual and policy basis, and the implementation of strategies in practice at the levels of the family, the community, and the wider society.

The Strategic Framework

Interreligious harmony refers to social relations between religious communities based on tolerance, mutual understanding, mutual respect, and recognition of equal rights to practice their respective religions. This principle is in line with the concept of religious moderation, which

[22] Iba, interview.
[23] Ernas and Qodir, "Agama dan Budaya dalam Integrasi Sosial."
[24] Kawu, "Penyelenggaraan Kepenyuluhan Keagamaan."
[25] Hamid Dwiyono and Twediana Budi Hapsari, "Optimalisasi Peran Penyuluh di Bidang Konseling Islam di KUA Wirobrajan Yogyakarta," *Al-Qalam: Jurnal Ilmiah Keagamaan dan Kemasyarakatan* 18, no. 1 (2024), https://doi.org/10.35931/aq.v18i1.3018.

emphasizes a just and balanced way of being religious that avoids extremes, particularly in plural and multicultural societies. Interreligious conflict is generally triggered by exclusive attitudes, claims to sole truth, and the rejection of difference that leads to intolerance; religious counselors are therefore a strategic element in preventing potential conflict and strengthening social harmony through an inclusive and dialogical religious approach.

Religious counselors act not only as providers of religious guidance but also as social movers who instill tolerance, equality, and cooperation among religious communities. Previous research shows that counselors' strategies include planning through a heart-to-heart approach, implementation through advice and direction, and regular evaluation, which allow counselors to adapt their methods to local characteristics and community needs.[26] In Fakfak, the direction of religious counseling is formulated on the basis of local wisdom and the value of togetherness, as set out in the *Arah dan Kebijakan KUA Teluk Patipi Tahun 2019–2024*. This framework places the family, the community, and cross-sector cooperation at the core of efforts to strengthen interreligious harmony.[27]

Implementation of the Strategies

The counselors' strategies are implemented through programs and activities that reach from the smallest social unit to the wider community. The first strategy is family- and community-based guidance, such as the *Keluarga Sakinah* program and the strengthening of village *majelis taklim*. This approach positions the family as the initial space for internalizing tolerance, equality, and mutual respect in religious life.[28] The second strategy is counseling on religious moderation, prioritizing interfaith dialogue and the use of digital media. This approach enables counselors to reach wider groups, including young people, while instilling the understanding that religious difference is a social reality to be addressed wisely and peacefully.[29] The third strategy is collaboration between religious and customary leaders based on the local philosophy of *Satu Tungku Tiga Batu*, which emphasizes brotherhood, togetherness, and interreligious cooperation as the foundation of social life in Fakfak; through this collaboration, counselors strengthen tolerance and equality while respecting local traditions.[30]

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[26] Robi Nur Hakiki, Ghiffari Ananda Gumay, and Rini Setyawati, "Strategy of Islamic Religious Counselors in Increasing the Practice of Worship," *Jurnal Dakwah dan Komunikasi* 8, no. 2 (2023), https://doi.org/10.29240/jdk.v8i2.8592.

[27] Kantor Urusan Agama Distrik Teluk Patipi, *Arah dan Kebijakan KUA Teluk Patipi Tahun 2019–2024* (Fakfak: KUA Distrik Teluk Patipi, 2019).

[28] Galih Sukandar, Muhammad Nurul Yamin, and Aris Fauzan, "Strategi Komunikasi Penyuluh Agama dalam Pembinaan Keluarga Islam di Purwosari," *Al-Qalam: Jurnal Ilmiah Keagamaan dan Kemasyarakatan* 17, no. 5 (2023): 3670, https://doi.org/10.35931/aq.v17i5.2690.

[29] Ita Masita Sagara (resident of Patipi Pasir Village), interview by the author, Teluk Patipi, 2025; Nasir and Wazis, "Strategi Komunikasi Penyuluh Agama Islam."

[30] Fithra (religious counselor, Fakfak Regency), interview by the author, Fakfak, 2025.

At the family level, persuasive and educational communication is applied through counseling, group dialogue, and shared spiritual activities,[31] an approach that effectively fosters respect for differences and prevents religious prejudice.[32] At the level of the wider community, the Interreligious Harmony Forum (*Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama*, FKUB) is an important platform for dialogue, education, and the strengthening of interfaith social networks.[33] Social activities such as *gotong royong* are also used to habituate cooperation and solidarity among religious communities,[34] which strengthens social cohesion and fosters a collective awareness of the importance of peaceful coexistence.

In summary, the counselors' strategies can be categorized as follows:

1. a communicative approach, through dialogue, discussion, and consultation;
2. an educational approach, through counseling on moderate and inclusive religious values;
3. a social-practical approach, through social activities, *gotong royong*, and the habituation of religious values in daily life; and
4. an adaptive approach grounded in local wisdom and tailored to the conditions of families, communities, and local society.

Through these strategies, religious counselors act as catalysts of social change who promote harmony, tolerance, and unity within religious communities. The effectiveness of religious guidance is thus measured not only by individuals' religious understanding but also by its capacity to build cohesive and inclusive communities.

Obstacles and Challenges Faced by Religious Counselors

Religious counselors play a crucial role in maintaining the moral, social, and spiritual balance of society, functioning as catalysts of community growth, facilitators of spiritual practice, and negotiators of complex social interactions. In practice, they face complex obstacles arising from internal factors, such as personal capacity and skills, and external factors, including geography, institutional support, and social change. Following Kamriana's study of the professionalism of Islamic religious counselors in Sinjai Regency, these challenges can be grouped into three categories: structural and institutional obstacles, competence and professionalism obstacles, and social and ideological challenges.[35]

[31] Nasir and Wazis, "Strategi Komunikasi Penyuluh Agama Islam."

[32] Said Al-Jubaidi (religious counselor, Teluk Patipi District), interview by the author, Fakfak, 2025.

[33] Nuriah and Prihatini, "Strategi Komunikasi Penyuluh Agama Swadaya," 125.

[34] Irma Rahmayani, "Peran Penyuluh Agama Islam dalam Membina Kerukunan Umat Beragama di Kelurahan Malino Kecamatan Tinggi Moncong Kabupaten Gowa" (undergraduate thesis, Universitas Islam Negeri Alauddin Makassar, 2017).

[35] Kamriana, "Profesionalisme Penyuluh Agama Islam di Kabupaten Sinjai (Studi tentang Bimbingan Penyuluh)" (master's thesis, Universitas Islam Negeri Alauddin Makassar, 2023).

Structural and Institutional Obstacles

The most significant structural obstacles are geographical barriers and inadequate supporting facilities. Many villages in Teluk Patipi can be reached only by sea, which limits counselors' mobility and requires substantial additional operational costs.[36] Shortages of human resources, inadequate working facilities, and transportation problems significantly hamper counseling activities, especially in rural and remote areas.[37]

Competence and Professionalism Obstacles

In addition to structural constraints, religious counselors face problems related to their skills and professional standards. In the modern world, counselors must possess multidisciplinary skills: they need to master religious content as well as public communication, social psychology, and digital skills in order to convey their messages effectively.[38] A significant challenge in Teluk Patipi is the declining interest of young people in religious activities. A resident of Patipi Pasir Village stated that rapid modernization and the influence of social media have led some teenagers to prioritize entertainment over religious education.[39] Many religious educators have not fully used social media, podcasts, and digital platforms, even though these channels are effective means of promoting religious values in an attractive and relevant way.[40] Moreover, as a mark of professionalism, counselors need strong public communication skills that are rhetorical, persuasive, and flexible, so that their messages reach all levels of society both face to face and through digital platforms; a lack of training and mentoring in communication often reduces the effectiveness of religious counseling.[41]

Social and Ideological Challenges

Religious counselors also face more complex social and ideological problems. In 2019, for example, differences between customary and religious views in the Patipi area triggered a conflict between religious groups. The problem was eventually resolved through dialogue and mediation based on religious principles, demonstrating the counselors' capacity to act as social

[36] Al-Jubaidi, interview.

[37] Abdul Basit, "Tantangan Profesi Penyuluh Agama Islam dan Pemberdayaannya," *Jurnal Dakwah* 15, no. 1 (2014).

[38] Maryatul Kibtyah, Dzurratul Lailil Mufidah, and Nur Winda Astuti, "Opportunities and Challenges of the Religious Extension Profession in the Digital Age," *Jurnal Penyuluhan Agama* 10, no. 2 (2023), https://doi.org/10.15408/jpa.v10i2.27222.

[39] Sagara, interview.

[40] Kurniawan and Rapiun, *Penyuluh Agama Islam Melek Digital*, 57; Leonard Chrysostomos Epafras, Hendrikus Paulus Kaunang, and Siti Aliyuna Prastiti, "Religious Moderation, Expert, Social Media Content, Newbie?: Religious Extension Officers in Social Media," *Al-Balagh: Jurnal Dakwah dan Komunikasi* 9, no. 2 (2024), https://doi.org/10.22515/albalagh.v9i2.7635.

[41] Abdul Rahman, "Tantangan dan Peluang Penyuluh Agama di Era Digital," *Dakwah: Jurnal Kajian Dakwah dan Kemasyarakatan* 25, no. 1 (2021), https://doi.org/10.15408/dakwah.v25i1.23185.

mediators and guardians of religious unity.[42] This shows that counselors need not only technical preaching skills but also interpersonal skills in handling conflict. Resistance to the concept of religious moderation often arises in society, especially where exclusive and intolerant beliefs prevail,[43] so counselors need to develop a dialogical, inclusive, and culturally grounded approach to *da'wah*.

Globalization and technological progress have also changed public perceptions of religion, requiring counselors to have strong social awareness and the ability to adapt their teaching approaches to the local environment while preserving the essence of Islamic principles. Counselors also face difficulties in building cross-sector partnerships, for example with health workers in addressing stunting, as communication barriers between professionals and a lack of joint training hinder religiously oriented programs that address the social-practical needs of the community.[44]

In general, the obstacles faced by religious counselors are complex and overlap across structural, professional, and socio-ideological factors. Addressing them requires a plan to improve counselors' capacity through continuous training, the development of digital skills, and institutional and logistical support from local authorities. Counselors must continue to develop adaptive, contextual, and community-oriented preaching techniques that meet the spiritual needs of modern society while maintaining core religious principles.

CONCLUSION

Religious counselors in Teluk Patipi District, Fakfak Regency, play a strategic and multidimensional role as transmitters of religious teachings, social mediators, moral educators, community facilitators, and agents of social transformation. This role integrates spiritual, social, cultural, and educational aspects in fostering religious life and maintaining interreligious harmony. Counselors instill tolerance, religious moderation, and social ethics through family guidance, *majelis taklim*, community activities, and collaboration with customary and religious leaders, thereby strengthening social cohesion along the indicators of tolerance, equality, and cooperation, while the use of digital media allows them to reach wider audiences, especially young people. Their strategies combine communicative, educational, social-practical, and adaptive approaches grounded in the local philosophy of *Satu Tungku Tiga Batu*. Despite structural, competence-related, and socio-ideological obstacles, their role can be strengthened through five measures: improving counselors' competence in digital literacy, public

[42] Iba, interview.

[43] Rohman and Syakur, "Penyuluh Agama sebagai Agen Moderasi Beragama."

[44] Susi Susilawati et al., "Office of Religious Affairs Banawa's Efforts in Minimizing Stunting Cases in Donggala Regency," *Suloh: Jurnal Fakultas Hukum Universitas Malikussaleh* 12, no. 2 (2024), https://doi.org/10.29103/sjp.v12i2.18091.

communication, social mediation, and culturally grounded *da'wah*; using platforms such as social media and podcasts to reach young people; integrating customary values with religious teachings; strengthening institutional support and operational facilities, particularly for counselors in remote areas; and building collaborative strategies with customary and religious leaders, educational institutions, and community organizations. Future research could measure the contribution of religious counselors to the harmony index quantitatively and compare their practices across districts in Papua.

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