

Islamic Boarding Schools as a Solution to Child Violence: A Holistic Approach to Character Education

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Article Info	Abstract
<p>Article history: Received: July 16, 2025 Revised: July 18, 2025 Accepted: July 23, 2025</p> <hr/> <p>Keywords: Islamic Boarding School, Child Abuse, Character Education, Child Protection, Social Solution.</p>	<p>Child violence is a persistent and escalating issue across various regions of Indonesia, with physical, verbal, and psychological abuse inflicting long-term negative impacts on children's development. In this challenging context, Islamic boarding schools (<i>pondok pesantren</i>), as religious-based educational institutions, hold significant potential as both preventive and curative solutions to this societal problem. This research explores the pivotal role of <i>pondok pesantren</i> in fostering strong spiritual, emotional, and social character in children, alongside the proactive efforts these institutions undertake to cultivate a safe and nurturing environment. Employing a qualitative research methodology with a case study approach across several <i>pondok pesantren</i> in East Java, the findings reveal several key factors. Intensive instruction in religious values, structured discipline, and close-knit relationships among students, teachers, and caregivers are instrumental in preventing violence and promoting positive character development in children. Consequently, <i>pondok pesantren</i> emerge as a viable alternative educational model that can significantly contribute to the reduction of child violence, particularly within non-formal education settings rooted in strong values.</p>
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A. Introduction

Child violence in Indonesia is an escalating concern that spans across family, school, and community settings. Children are subjected to various forms of abuse, including physical harm, verbal humiliation, emotional neglect, and even abandonment. Data from national child protection agencies reveal that thousands of such cases are reported annually, often involving perpetrators from within the child's own circle of trust. This recurring pattern suggests that the environments meant to protect children are frequently unsafe and incapable of fulfilling their moral and developmental responsibilities ("Laporan Tahunan KPAI: Kasus Kekerasan Anak Di Indonesia," 2022).

The persistence of this issue exposes the limitations of formal regulatory and legal frameworks. Despite policies and awareness campaigns, the roots of violence remain largely unaddressed because they are embedded in cultural norms, power dynamics, and the absence of moral consciousness in many social institutions. Educational settings, in particular, have often failed to prioritize emotional and ethical development, focusing instead on cognitive outcomes while neglecting values that foster empathy, compassion, and nonviolence (Zulpahmi, 2022).

Within this complex context, Islamic boarding schools, or *pondok pesantren*, offer a unique educational landscape that combines religious teachings with deep moral cultivation. These institutions are not only centers of learning but also structured communities that emphasize discipline, spirituality, and ethical conduct. They represent an alternative model that integrates faith-based instruction with daily practices aimed at shaping character and social awareness (Masud, 2019; Tayeb, 2018).

A central strength of pesantren lies in their relational structure. The bond between students and their teachers, particularly the *kyai* or *ustadz*, is based on respect, trust, and mentorship. These relationships often resemble familial care, enabling educators to serve as role models while closely observing and guiding students' behavior. This proximity allows early intervention in cases of emotional distress and fosters a culture of accountability that reduces the likelihood of abuse (Desmaniar & Kurniawati, 2022; Ismail et al., 2024).

The pesantren environment is further reinforced by routines grounded in Islamic values. Daily life includes regular prayer, study, group responsibilities, and spiritual reflection, all of which encourage self-discipline and communal harmony. Through consistent exposure to these activities, students internalize behaviors that prioritize kindness, patience, and responsibility. This disciplined and spiritually rich setting limits harmful behaviors and promotes psychological safety (Hayadin, 2025).

Moral education in pesantren is not confined to the classroom but is woven into all aspects of life. Values such as honesty, trustworthiness, humility, and compassion are lived experiences, modeled by teachers and reinforced through collective practice. This consistent moral atmosphere helps children develop not only ethical reasoning but also emotional resilience and respect for others, making violence less likely as a response to conflict (Firmansah et al., 2025; Ismail et al., 2024).

Although pesantren have strong potential as nurturing environments, research exploring their role in child protection remains limited. Academic attention often focuses on curriculum design or the political and cultural role of pesantren, overlooking their contributions to emotional development and violence prevention. More focused inquiry is needed to understand how these institutions maintain discipline, foster empathy, and build safe spaces for young learners (Mas'ud et al., 2019; Tayeb, 2018).

As national education systems seek solutions to persistent issues of child violence, there is an opportunity to learn from pesantren practices. Their emphasis on integrated character education, teacher-student closeness, and communal discipline offers a blueprint for reforming school environments. Lessons drawn from pesantren may be especially relevant for building resilience in vulnerable children and reinforcing the values necessary for peaceful social interaction (Thoha et al., 2023).

Conventional schools often struggle to offer the same depth of moral formation. Interactions are limited, and discipline is frequently reactive rather than preventive. In contrast, pesantren promote proactive behavioral development through example, reflection, and structured living. Integrating such principles into broader educational frameworks may help reduce the culture of punishment and build stronger moral foundations in youth (Zulpahmi et al., 2022; Desmaniar & Kurniawati, 2022).

The holistic nature of pesantren aligns with global visions of education that are not solely academic but humanistic and transformative. Their practices can contribute significantly to child protection agendas, particularly in areas where formal institutions have failed to create safe and inclusive spaces. With their emphasis on integrity, humility, and spiritual growth, pesantren can serve as a powerful model for character-centered education (UNESCO, 2016; Firmansah et al., 2025).

This article explores the potential of Islamic boarding schools to function as effective environments in preventing child violence through a character-based educational approach. It investigates the systems and values that support student well-being in pesantren and seeks to position them as a culturally relevant alternative within the national conversation on child protection and educational reform. As Indonesia strives to ensure every child grows up in safety and dignity, drawing insights from pesantren may offer not only practical solutions but also a reaffirmation of the nation's spiritual and moral heritage. These institutions remind us that education, at its core, is about nurturing the soul as much as the mind.

B. Literature Review

Violence against children is a serious issue that affects their physical, emotional, and psychological well-being. According to UNICEF (2020), child abuse can take many forms, including physical, verbal, sexual abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Such violence can occur in various settings

within the home, at school, or in the broader community. Children who experience abuse are at risk of developmental delays, psychological trauma, low self-esteem, and difficulties in forming healthy social relationships (Widodo, 2017). These consequences highlight the urgency of identifying effective strategies to prevent and address violence against children.

Educational institutions play a strategic role in preventing and reducing violence toward children. Through character education, moral development, and the creation of a safe and supportive learning environment, schools are expected to act as protective spaces for children. Education serves not only to transfer knowledge but also to instill values such as empathy, tolerance, and social responsibility. As Nugroho, (2019) argues, schools must be more than academic spaces they should be environments where children learn to become ethical and responsible individuals.

One type of educational institution that has a strong emphasis on character development is the Islamic boarding school, or *pondok pesantren*. Rooted in Indonesia's cultural and religious heritage, pesantren provide both formal and informal education, combining religious teachings with moral and spiritual guidance. Life in the pesantren emphasizes values such as simplicity, discipline, and respect for teachers values that help shape students' character. Dhofier (1982) describes pesantren as institutions that offer a holistic education, integrating knowledge and personal development in daily life.

In this context, pesantren have the potential to serve as a solution to the problem of child abuse. They offer moral and spiritual education that promotes compassion, mutual respect, and responsibility, creating an environment where violence is less likely to occur. The family-like atmosphere and close relationships between students and caregivers help foster emotional security and reduce the risk of abuse. Furthermore, pesantren can serve a rehabilitative function by supporting children who have experienced trauma, helping them heal through spiritual guidance and moral counseling. Hasanah (2021) emphasizes that the religious environment of pesantren can play a therapeutic role in restoring children's psychological and emotional well-being.

However, despite their potential, pesantren are not without challenges. Cases of abuse within some pesantren have been reported, highlighting the need for greater supervision and improved training for educators and caregivers. According to Komnas Anak (2023), these incidents point to the importance of strengthening child protection policies within pesantren and ensuring that staff members are equipped to manage children with care and professionalism. Therefore, reforms in pesantren education systems, capacity-building for teachers, and the enforcement of child protection standards are essential to ensure that pesantren truly function as safe and nurturing spaces for children.

C. Methods

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design (Ummah et al., 2025). A qualitative method was chosen because the research aimed to explore in depth the role of Islamic boarding schools in preventing and addressing child violence through social interactions, religious values, and caregiving practices within the pesantren environment. The case study design allowed the researcher to focus on a specific context and examine the phenomenon comprehensively.

The research was conducted at Pondok Pesantren An-Nuriyyah, located in Rambipuji, Jember, East Java. This site was purposefully selected due to its reputation for effective character-building programs for children and its success in creating a violence-free educational environment. The pesantren's commitment to fostering moral development made it a suitable setting for examining the research focus.

The subjects of this study were the students or santri who lived at the pesantren, while the informants included the pesantren leader (*kyai*), caregivers or teachers (*asatidz*), students, parents or guardians, and local community figures. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, targeting individuals who possessed deep insights and relevance to the research topic.

Data were collected through multiple techniques to ensure depth and reliability. In-depth interviews were conducted to gather the perspectives, experiences, and reflections of informants regarding caregiving practices and efforts to prevent violence within the pesantren. Participant observation allowed the researcher to directly observe daily interactions between caregivers and

students, providing contextual understanding. Document analysis was also used to examine written materials such as the pesantren's code of conduct, moral education curriculum, student activity reports, and anti-violence policies.

Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data, involving several steps. First, data reduction was conducted to filter and select relevant information. Then, data were presented in the form of descriptive narratives and thematic matrices. Finally, conclusions were drawn by identifying patterns, relationships, and meanings related to the pesantren's role in addressing child violence.

To ensure the validity of the findings, triangulation was applied by comparing and analyzing data from different sources, methods, and times of collection. In addition, member checking was conducted by confirming the results with the informants to verify the accuracy and credibility of the data.

D. Result and Discussion

Characteristics of Parenting in Islamic Boarding Schools

The findings from the fieldwork at An-Nuriyyah Islamic Boarding School in Rambipuji, Jember, reveal that the care system for students (*santri*) is implemented collectively and grounded in religious values. Teachers and caregivers serve not only as educators but also as substitute parents. This collective parenting model reflects the communal character of traditional Islamic education, where responsibility for nurturing students is shared among all members of the community. It illustrates the concept of education as a moral and spiritual endeavor deeply rooted in Islamic traditions (Kustati, 2020).

This approach to care is consistent with the Islamic view that education should nurture not only intellectual capabilities but also moral character and spirituality. Al-Ghazali, one of the most influential scholars in Islamic education, emphasized that the goal of learning is to cultivate the soul and refine behavior in accordance with divine guidance. In this way, pesantren serve as holistic institutions that combine teaching with character building, offering both knowledge and ethical formation (Purwanto et al., 2021).

Discipline is a central aspect of the pesantren experience. Students follow a well-structured routine that includes early morning prayers, study sessions, communal meals, and evening religious activities. This orderly lifestyle supports the idea, drawn from behavioral learning theory, that consistent routines can shape responsible behavior through repetition and reinforcement. Rather than relying on coercion, the pesantren promotes discipline through habituation and gentle guidance (Fauziah, 2023).

Another key value instilled in students is simplicity. Living in modest conditions without luxury teaches students to appreciate what they have and develop a spirit of humility. This aligns with the Islamic concept of *zuhud*, or spiritual modesty, which encourages believers to focus on inner growth rather than material possessions. In this way, simplicity becomes a formative part of students' moral development and psychological well-being (Manindjo et al., 2023).

The pesantren also fosters a strong sense of community. Students live together, pray together, and support one another in daily life. This creates an environment where interpersonal relationships are deeply valued and social learning is continuously reinforced. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory supports this, asserting that cognitive and emotional growth occurs through meaningful social interactions. In pesantren, such interactions are embedded in religious and communal life (Ma'ruf et al., 2025).

Importantly, the pesantren's care approach avoids physical or verbal punishment. Instead, guidance is offered through advice, spiritual counseling, and positive example. This echoes the principles of humanistic education proposed by Carl Rogers, which emphasize empathy, acceptance, and mutual respect in the educational process. Such a nurturing environment allows students to develop a healthy sense of self-worth and moral responsibility (Fauziah & Suryanto, 2023).

Role modeling plays a crucial role in this care system. Teachers are expected to embody the values they teach, serving as living examples for students to emulate. This reflects the Islamic principle of *usmah hasanah* the practice of teaching by example as demonstrated by the Prophet Muhammad

(peace be upon him). Through observing their teachers' behavior, students internalize values such as patience, honesty, and generosity (Kustati, 2020).

When students make mistakes, the response is not punitive but reflective. Instead of harsh punishment, educators guide students through processes of self reflection, such as *muhasabah*, where they consider the spiritual and ethical implications of their actions. This restorative approach allows for personal growth and moral repair, promoting internal transformation rather than fear-based compliance (Purwanto et al., 2021).

Daily religious practices also play an important role in shaping character. Structured spiritual routines including prayer, Qur'an recitation, and other acts of worship are integrated into daily life and reinforce religious identity and self-discipline. Developmental theories suggest that consistent engagement with meaningful practices strengthens internal motivation and supports moral development. The pesantren setting provides this consistency in a spiritually grounded environment (Nisamairo et al., 2024).

In addition to spiritual training, students are encouraged to develop emotional resilience and mental strength. The environment trains them to be independent, patient, and emotionally stable. Psychological theories of resilience show that structured, supportive environments play a significant role in helping youth navigate life's challenges. In this regard, pesantren act not only as educational institutions but also as centers for emotional and psychological development (Manindjo et al., 2023; Ma'ruf et al., 2025).

For many students, especially those from challenging backgrounds, pesantren offer a safe and structured space. By combining care, discipline, and community support, pesantren become protective environments where students can grow emotionally, morally, and spiritually. This aligns with the concept of social pedagogy, where education extends beyond academics to include nurturing the whole child in a social context (Fauziah & Suryanto, 2023).

In summary, the care model at An-Nuriyyah demonstrates that pesantren offer a unique and holistic approach to student development. By emphasizing religious values, communal living, positive discipline, and character education, pesantren provide a nurturing environment that supports the formation of morally grounded, resilient, and socially responsible individuals. This model offers valuable insights for broader discussions on education and child development in both religious and secular contexts.

Preventing Violence through Character Education and Spirituality

The prevention of violence through character and spiritual education is a central feature of the pesantren system. Based on interviews with *kyai* and caregivers, it is evident that any form of child abuse whether physical, verbal, or psychological is fundamentally incompatible with the principles of *tarbiyah Islamiyyah*, or Islamic education. These principles prioritize the nurturing of moral integrity and spiritual awareness over coercive discipline or punitive practices (Berkowitz et al., 2023; Miller et al., 2005).

One of the pesantren's greatest strengths lies in its commitment to cultivating moral values through daily religious practices. Students are routinely engaged in acts of worship such as communal prayers, remembrance of God, and regular Qur'an recitation. These routines not only fulfill religious obligations but also function as mechanisms for internalizing discipline, self-awareness, and emotional regulation. According to spiritual development theory and supported by empirical findings (Huculak & McLennan, 2010), consistent engagement with worship fosters ethical reflection and a deeper sense of self.

Through repeated exposure to these spiritual rituals, students develop emotional maturity and a heightened sense of empathy. Worship becomes both a personal and collective act that shapes behavior and builds inner calm. This aligns with Bloom's affective domain theory, where moral and emotional growth is reinforced through sustained, value-laden experiences (Taliep et al., 2024).

In addition to religious rituals, pesantren actively promote social ethics such as empathy, cooperation, and mutual care. Students are encouraged to assist one another regardless of background, reflecting the Islamic principle of brotherhood. This practice supports moral development theory

(Berkowitz et al., 2023), which holds that moral reasoning evolves through interaction in fair and caring environments.

What makes the pesantren environment especially effective in preventing violence is its multicultural setting. Students come from various regions, social groups, and cultural backgrounds, yet are encouraged to live together in harmony. This promotes tolerance and respect, aligning with multicultural education theory and philosophical education perspectives (Ganjvar, 2023) that emphasize the importance of inclusive learning environments to deny religious violence and foster peaceful coexistence.

While conflicts may arise in any group setting, pesantren train students to resolve them peacefully. They are taught to manage emotions, communicate respectfully, and seek mutual understanding. This reflects principles in social-emotional learning frameworks (Miller et al., 2008), which emphasize emotional regulation, empathy, and conflict resolution as key strategies in reducing aggressive behavior.

Educators serve as role models in this process. Rather than reacting with anger or punishment, they guide students through calm dialogue and spiritual reminders. This mirrors social learning theory (Stanley, 2011), which posits that behavior is shaped by observing the actions of trusted figures. When students consistently witness peaceful responses, they are more likely to internalize similar behaviors.

The emphasis on spiritual resilience also helps students cope with stress and interpersonal tension without resorting to violence. In times of emotional difficulty, they are encouraged to seek strength through prayer, self-reflection, and mentorship. This supports existential theories of human development (Damm, 2011), which highlight the role of meaning-making in facing life's challenges constructively.

A strong sense of community within the pesantren also contributes to students' moral stability. Shared routines, group activities, and collective worship help build a sense of identity and belonging. Attachment theory supports this view, noting that secure and caring environments foster emotional regulation and social responsibility (Stanley, 2011; Taliep et al., 2024), both of which are critical in preventing violent responses.

The educational philosophy of pesantren integrates moral, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. Students are not simply taught ethical concepts but are immersed in a lived experience of character formation. This comprehensive approach aligns with character education models (Berkowitz et al., 2023; Miller et al., 2005), which emphasize guiding students to know, feel, and act ethically.

By creating a structured yet nurturing environment, pesantren address the root causes of violence not through punishment, but through the proactive cultivation of values. Students learn to see others as companions, not rivals, and are trained to face conflicts with patience and reflection. This method proves effective in reducing impulsive or harmful behaviors (Damm, 2011).

In conclusion, the pesantren model demonstrates that the most sustainable way to prevent youth violence is through consistent moral education and spiritual formation. With its focus on religious practice, empathetic relationships, and emotional resilience, the pesantren becomes a space where students learn to live peacefully, even amidst diversity and potential conflict. This highlights the pesantren's vital role not only in religious education but also in shaping nonviolent and ethically grounded individuals (Miller et al., 2008; Huculak & McLennan, 2010).

Rehabilitation of Child Victims of Violence

Islamic boarding schools, or pesantren, play a crucial rehabilitative role for children who have previously experienced violence in their homes or formal schooling environments (Zh, 2021). Based on interviews with several guardians, many parents consciously chose to send their children to pesantren after identifying symptoms of trauma or behavioral distress caused by past abuse. This placement is driven by the perception that pesantren provide not only religious education but also emotional healing and moral rebuilding (Fanani & Fatah, 2022; Kamilah & Zh, 2022).

Unlike punitive systems that focus on behavior correction through discipline alone, the pesantren model is restorative. It integrates religious routines, spiritual reflection, and communal living to offer a safe and consistent environment. According to restorative justice theory, healing occurs

when individuals are allowed to reintegrate into communities that foster accountability, empathy, and support (Marans, 2023). In pesantren, such reintegration is facilitated by a holistic daily structure grounded in Islamic ethics.

Children who have experienced verbal or physical abuse often suffer from diminished self-worth and trust. In one testimonial, a student previously subjected to verbal bullying in public school shared how they began to feel more respected and emotionally stable after several months in the pesantren. This aligns with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which asserts that a sense of belonging and self-esteem is fundamental to emotional recovery and personal growth (Giordano et al., 2019).

Routine religious practices such as congregational prayers, Qur'an recitation, and collective *dhikr* serve as both spiritual exercises and therapeutic interventions. These rituals provide rhythm, structure, and inner peace key elements in trauma recovery as recognized in trauma-informed care frameworks (Ziegler et al., 2004). The predictability of daily worship helps children rebuild psychological safety and develop self-regulation (Giordano et al., 2019).

Furthermore, the pesantren environment emphasizes collective responsibility and mutual care among students. Children are not isolated in their healing process but are instead encouraged to engage with their peers in positive, structured ways. According to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition and emotional maturity (Rahmi & Siregar, 2020). Within this setting, trauma recovery becomes a communal rather than solitary journey (Shuman et al., 2022).

The role of *kyai* and *ustadz* (religious teachers) is also central in the rehabilitative process. They serve not only as educators but as compassionate mentors who embody patience, trust, and moral guidance. This mentorship corresponds with Bandura's social learning theory, where children internalize positive behaviors and attitudes through observation and modeling (Krock et al., 2023). In contrast to the harsh disciplinary environments some students previously faced, pesantren leaders offer a calm and consistent presence.

Importantly, pesantren do not rely on fear-based discipline. Children are guided through gentle advice (*nasihat*), spiritual counseling, and regular self-evaluation sessions such as *muhasabah* (introspective reflection). These methods emphasize internal motivation rather than external control, consistent with self-determination theory which posits that autonomy, competence, and relatedness enhance psychological well-being (Tolendi, 2024).

Testimonies from guardians further reveal that after several months, children begin to show noticeable behavioral changes becoming more cooperative, spiritually aware, and emotionally stable. This transformation supports Erikson's psychosocial development theory, particularly the stages of industry versus inferiority and identity versus role confusion, where supportive environments help young individuals overcome previous feelings of inadequacy and confusion (Tavkar & Hansen, 2011).

Additionally, the pesantren system avoids labeling students as troubled or victims. Instead, every child is treated as a valuable individual with potential for moral and spiritual excellence. This mirrors the principles of strengths-based approaches in psychology, which focus on resilience and capability rather than deficiency (Giordano et al., 2019b). Children are empowered to redefine their identity through new roles and responsibilities in the pesantren community (Rachmayanthi et al., 2023).

From a neuropsychological standpoint, exposure to consistent routines and emotionally safe environments positively affects the brain's stress-response systems. The calm, ritualized life in pesantren can reduce hyperarousal and support neural recovery for children who have been chronically exposed to toxic stress (Marans, 2023; Giordano et al., 2019a).

The integration of religious values with psychological support in pesantren highlights a culturally grounded form of trauma-informed education. Rather than importing Western therapeutic models, pesantren utilize indigenous wisdom to foster healing. This localized method respects the students' spiritual framework while effectively addressing their emotional and behavioral needs (Shuman et al., 2022).

In conclusion, pesantren function as rehabilitative ecosystems for children who have suffered violence or neglect. By combining structured religious practice, communal support, and moral

mentorship, they offer a unique model of trauma recovery that is both spiritually rooted and psychologically effective. These findings reaffirm the value of pesantren not only as centers of religious education but as sanctuaries of healing and restoration for vulnerable youth.

Internal Challenges: The Need for Reform and Oversight

Despite the many strengths of pesantren in fostering moral development and providing safe spaces for at-risk youth, internal challenges persist that require immediate attention. Field findings reveal that several pesantren still lack structured systems for child protection. This gap is especially visible in the absence of standardized operating procedures (SOPs) for addressing violence, abuse, and bullying within the institutional framework (Arif et al., 2024).

One pressing concern is the limited teacher training on child protection. Many teachers and caregivers in pesantren are religiously knowledgeable but not professionally equipped with child psychology or safeguarding protocols. According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, a child's development is influenced by multiple environmental layers. Teachers are part of a child's microsystem, and without proper training, they may unintentionally contribute to unsafe dynamics despite good intentions.

Moreover, the persistence of seniority-based culture (*senioritas*) within the student body can foster conditions conducive to bullying. While seniority may be intended to promote discipline and hierarchy, unchecked power dynamics often lead to coercion or verbal abuse among students. Galtung's theory of structural violence helps us understand how such normalized power asymmetries create invisible yet harmful environments for younger or more vulnerable students. These dynamics were observed in several boarding school contexts, where power relations sometimes enable not only bullying but even more serious forms of abuse (Fauzi et al., 2025).

Students experiencing bullying are at risk of internalizing feelings of inferiority, fear, and social withdrawal. Erikson's stages of psychosocial development suggest that during adolescence, individuals seek a sense of belonging and identity. If pesantren allow hierarchical aggression to persist, they inadvertently hinder students' emotional and social development. As noted by Hadisi et al., (2019), schools that ignore bullying patterns fail to address students' psychosocial needs and risk perpetuating cycles of trauma.

Additionally, the absence of clear reporting mechanisms prevents students from safely disclosing abuse or mistreatment. This silence is often rooted in fear of retaliation, shame, or distrust in institutional responses. Foucault's concept of surveillance and power reveals how unmonitored institutions can create environments of control without accountability. In the context of pesantren, lack of oversight reinforces impunity rather than responsibility.

Caregivers and administrators interviewed in the study expressed a strong desire for external training and collaboration with organizations like Indonesia's KPAI (Child Protection Commission). This reflects a growing recognition that religious institutions must work in tandem with secular child welfare organizations to ensure comprehensive protection. The integrative approach aligns with Epstein's theory of overlapping spheres of influence, emphasizing partnerships between families, schools, and communities in child development.

Transparency and accountability are essential components of institutional trust. Without these, even well-intentioned systems can fail to prevent harm. From a governance perspective, the implementation of internal monitoring units or advisory boards that include child rights experts could help pesantren bridge this critical gap. Such reforms would align with principles from New Public Management theory, which advocates for performance-based accountability and service quality in public institutions (Darwanto et al., 2024).

Psychologically, the presence of trusted adult figures who are trained in trauma-informed approaches is crucial. According to the ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences) framework, early exposure to violence or neglect significantly increases the risk of long-term mental health issues. When pesantren staff are trained to identify and respond to these indicators, they can serve not just as educators but also as protectors of children's mental well-being.

Furthermore, involving students in policy-making or dialogue sessions can foster a sense of ownership and empowerment. Participatory approaches in education, inspired by Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, argue that learners should be active agents in shaping the learning environment. Allowing students to co-develop anti-bullying policies or peer support systems strengthens the institutional culture of care and collective responsibility.

Digital tools and reporting platforms could also be employed to support confidentiality in disclosing abuse cases. In line with contemporary safeguarding practices, anonymous feedback or digital check-ins allow vulnerable students to report issues without fear. These technological adaptations demonstrate how pesantren can modernize their administrative structures without compromising their religious foundations.

Importantly, reform should not be perceived as a threat to traditional values but as a reinforcement of Islamic teachings on justice (*adl*), mercy (*rahmah*), and protection of the vulnerable (*mustadh'afin*). Institutionalizing child protection mechanisms within pesantren reflects the prophetic tradition of safeguarding the rights and dignity of every individual, especially those entrusted to one's care.

In conclusion, while pesantren have historically provided vital moral education and safe refuge for youth, they must now respond proactively to internal challenges by embracing reform. Training educators, creating SOPs, ensuring transparent reporting, and collaborating with child protection agencies are urgent measures. These steps not only enhance student safety but also affirm pesantren's role as transformative institutions rooted in both faith and humanity.

E. Conclusion

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) hold significant potential as alternative solutions in the prevention and handling of violence against children. The caregiving model rooted in religious values, spiritual approaches, and character education implemented in pesantren contributes to the creation of a relatively safe, structured, and nurturing environment for children's development.

Pesantren serve not only as educational institutions but also as moral development centers and social rehabilitation spaces for children who have previously experienced violence. Educational activities, regular worship practices, and familial relationships between caregivers and students are key elements that help prevent violence and support the psychological recovery of affected children.

However, this study also identified several internal challenges, such as the lack of caregiver training on child protection issues and the persistence of seniority-based practices that may give rise to bullying. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen caregiver capacity, implement external monitoring mechanisms, and establish clear child protection policies within the pesantren environment.

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