Management Practices in Pesantren: Addressing Child Abuse within Traditional Frameworks

Muhammad Fadhli [1]*, Fauzan Ahmad Siregar[2], Zulkhairi[3], Agus Salim Salabi[4], Muhammad Anggung Manumanoso Prasetyo[5], Zainal Abidin[6], Rahmat Hidayat[7]

[1]State Islamic University of North Sumatra, Indonesia
[2,3,4,5,6] Sultanah Nahrasiyah State Islamic University, Lhokseumawe, Indonesia
[7] Universitas Dharmawangsa, Indonesia
*Corresponding Author: muhammadfadhli@uinsu.ac.id

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ABSTRACT:

This study addresses the high incidence of child abuse within pesantren (Islamic boarding schools). The primary aim is to evaluate the role of pesantren as institutions in preventing such violence. The research employs a qualitative methodology, utilizing the interactive model of data analysis comprising data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification, as developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana. The participants include students (santri), alumni, teachers (ustadz), and pesantren management. The findings reveal three key insights: 1) the forms of violence occurring in pesantren, which include physical, psychological, and sexual abuse; 2) the factors contributing to the occurrence of violence, such as the absence of a robust monitoring system, entrenched seniority practices, the recruitment of teachers without psychological evaluation, inadequate sanctions and law enforcement, and the lack of an accessible reporting mechanism for students; and 3) the measures taken by pesantren to protect children from violence, which include minimizing the role of senior students, raising awareness among teachers, establishing a reporting system, and formulating agreements with students and parents. These findings highlight the presence of violence within pesantren, which is often perpetuated by a misguided paradigm among pesantren administrators who regard such practices as a component of the educational process for students.

Keywords: Pesantren, Management of Pesantren, Child Protection, Violence

Introduction/Pendahuluan

Pesantren (Islamic boarding schools), which are traditionally revered as centers of learning and moral development, have unfortunately become environments where violence against students is prevalent. According to data from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI), instances of violence have been reported at various educational levels: 39% in primary schools (SD/MI), 22% in junior high schools (SMP/MTs), and 39% in senior high schools (SMA/SMK/MA) (Fatiara, 2019). Kekerasan terhadap santri juga masih terjadi di pondok pesantren bahkan cenderung tinggi (Pfeiffer & Pinquart, 2014; Purnamasari, 2021; Putra, 2020; Tejomukti, 2020). This is particularly concerning given the growing interest among parents in pesantren as educational institutions for their children. Students in pesantren typically reside within the institution, necessitating constant supervision from the management. Thus, professional management practices that prioritize child protection are crucial in efforts to eliminate violence.

Child abuse is a significant contributor to physical harm, psychological distress, permanent physical disabilities, and long-term physical or mental health issues (Ferrara et al., 2019). Despite the severity of the problem, violence against children in *pesantren* continues to occur repeatedly without being comprehensively addressed. Existing literature tends to focus on the benefits or positive aspects of *pesantren* and religious education in child development (Izfanna & Hisyam, 2012; Noboru et al., 2021; Raihani, 2012). The issue of violence against children in general schools (Agnich & Miyazaki, 2013; Damanik, 2019; Elkins et al., 2017) rather than in *pesantren*. Additionally, some studies have examined the involvement of *pesantren* in violence or radicalism (Abubakar & Hemay, 2020; Hamdi et al., 2015; Sudrajat et al., 2018). but few have directly explored the issue of child abuse within *pesantren*.

This paper seeks to fill this gap by providing a detailed account of the violence occurring within pesantren and examining the role of pesantren as institutions in child protection. Specifically, this study aims to demonstrate that the protection of children from violence within pesantren is significantly influenced by the overall institutional framework of the pesantren. In line with this objective, the paper addresses three key questions: (a) What forms of child abuse occur in pesantren? (b) What factors contribute to the occurrence of child abuse in pesantren? (c) How does the presence of child abuse within pesantren impact the development of child protection policies within these institutions? Answering these questions will provide a deeper understanding of the causes of child abuse in pesantren.

This paper argues that the occurrence of child abuse in Islamic educational institutions, which should ideally serve as protective environments, is primarily due to weaknesses in the supervisory systems within pesantren and the long-standing tradition of violence. The modernization of child-rearing practices in pesantren must become a central focus of these institutions. Practices rooted in "preserving tradition" are increasingly irrelevant in the current educational landscape, particularly within pesantren.

This literature review analyzes the pertinent themes of the study, focusing on three critical aspects: child abuse, *pesantren*, and violence prevention.

2.1. Child Abuse

Child abuse occurs not only in locations far removed from supervision but also in environments presumed to be safe, such as homes and schools. Child abuse is a global issue that has significant implications for societal order (Ogba & Igu, 2019). The World Health Organization (WHO) classifies violence against children as a public health issue, as well as a human rights and social problem. (Butchart & Mikton, 2014). Educational institutions must serve as leaders and pioneers in efforts to break the cycle of violence against children.

Violence against children, in any form, is a grave issue with serious implications. School-related violence is one of the forms of abuse that occurs within educational settings. Bernard's study highlights that adverse situations in boarding schools (*pesantren*) can prompt students to engage in negative behaviors (Moswela, 2006). The impact of violence on children in boarding schools includes long-term traumatic effects and mental health issues (Jack & Devereux, 2019; Running Bear et al., 2018). The forms of violence experienced by children in schools include physical, psychological, and sexual abuse (Deb & Walsh, 2012; Longobardi et al., 2019). Physical abuse is the most commonly reported form of violence in schools, often disguised as punishment administered by teachers (Deveci et al., 2008; Devries et al., 2018; Grunseit et al., 2008). Psychological abuse is another form of violence against children that is frequently overlooked (Chen & Wei, 2013; Melanda et al., 2020)because it does not leave visible marks on the body as physical violence does. Sexual violence is also prevalent in educational institutions, including instances involving students and, at times, teachers or other educational staff (Koçtürk & Yüksel, 2018; Le Mat, 2016; Steiner et al., 2021). hese three forms of violence pose significant threats to the future development of children. Educational institutions, including *pesantren*, are vital components of the educational system that must ensure the safety of students from such forms of violence.

2.2. Pesantren

Pesantren play an essential role in community development in Indonesia and represent the origin of Islamic education institutions in the country. Over time, pesantren have undergone

transformations, now offering curricula beyond Islamic religious education (Syafe'i, 2017). However, some pesantren have maintained their traditional practices, undergoing little change since their inception.

The evolution of society and the pesantren has led to the emergence of diverse forms within these institutions. Pesantren that adhere strictly to traditional values, as established at their inception, are referred to as "traditional Islamic boarding schools." In contrast, those that incorporate modern developments, such as updated curricula and language instruction, are identified as "modern pesantren." Each type of pesantren is distinguished by its unique characteristics in implementing educational processes. A pesantren typically consists of three fundamental components: the independent leadership of a Kyai (Islamic scholar), the use of classical texts as reference materials, and a value system rooted in the study of classical Islamic literature (Zuhriy, 2011). Traditional pesantren are generally Kyai-centered, with the Kyai exercising full control over the management of human resources, finances, infrastructure, and social capital, as well as making all critical decisions within the institution (Wekke et al., 2019). In contrast, modern pesantren seek to integrate moral, academic, and scientific values into their educational focus, emphasizing skills such as communication, collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, and innovation, thus equipping graduates to navigate the increasingly competitive modern world (Isbah, 2020; Riyanti et al., 2020). While pesantren are fundamentally traditional educational institutions indigenous to Indonesia, the pressures and demands of contemporary society necessitate their adaptation, albeit with a steadfast commitment to preserving their core principles.

2.3. Violence Prevention

Efforts to prevent violence against children can be achieved through the development of prevention programs and interventions that protect children from violence, particularly within the context of addressing the pervasive stigma associated with social conflict, violence, and poverty (Njelesani, 2019). Several preventive measures can be implemented in pesantren, including strengthening government oversight of these institutions, providing legal education on the dangers of sexual violence to empower students to act when they encounter abuse, establishing complaint centers for sexual violence in educational institutions, and enhancing supervision by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Jamaludin & Prayuti, 2022)

In addition, regarding child-rearing practices and the internalization of values and knowledge, there should be a transition toward legislation that prohibits physical punishment of children and limits its use. The United Nations supports non-violent child-rearing practices under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This stance challenges the notion of a positive relationship between violence in child-rearing and the endorsement of violence in educational settings (Barbara, 2008).

METHOD/METODE PENELITIAN

Type of Research

This research employs a qualitative research method of the phenomenological type. Phenomenological research is utilized in this study to examine and focus on understanding the lived experiences of individuals who are or have been involved in education within Islamic boarding schools (pesantren). This approach is undertaken as an effort to explore and describe the essence of a phenomenon as experienced by individuals in these pesantren. The researcher aims to categorize individual perspectives, involving in-depth interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Moustakas, 1994). The research will be conducted in two provinces: Aceh and North Sumatra, and will take place throughout the year 2023.

Data Collection and Analysis Techniques

Data collection techniques include interviews, observations, and the study of documents that may provide insights into occurrences of violence and their underlying factors. For data analysis, an interactive model will be used, which includes: data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles et al., 2014).

Participants in the Study

The study will involve four pesantren in each province, which will serve as research subjects. The provinces selected for this research are Aceh and North Sumatra. The subjects of this study include students (santri), alumni, teachers (ustadz), and management personnel of the pesantren. Additionally, figures or institutions considered to have expertise in child protection (such as the National Commission for Child Protection, KPAI, and the pesantren section within the Ministry of Religious Affairs) will also be involved.

Table 1: Research Location Classification

No	Province	Pesantren
1	Aceh	1. Dayah Ulumuddin, Lhokseumawe
		2. Dayah Pesantren Al Muslimun, Aceh Utara
2	Sumatera Utara	1. Pesantren Darul Arafah, Deli Serdang
		2. Pesantren Mustafawiyah, Mandailing Natal

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This study aims to explore the role of pesantren as educational institutions in preventing and addressing issues of violence. The research focuses on three main areas: the forms of violence occurring in pesantren, the underlying causes of such violence, and the efforts made by pesantren to protect children from violence.

1. Forms of Violence in Pesantren

At least three types of violence have been identified within pesantren: physical, psychological, and sexual. These findings are summarized and categorized in Table 2.

Table 2 Forms of Violence

No	Category	Form of Violence	Source
1	Verbal Violence (considered normal)	It is common to mock each other, especially when mentioning parents' names in reports	Ustadz Ulumuddin
		Verbal mockery is challenging to control, as children sometimes do not report it	Ustadz Almuslimun
		Sometimes we mock each other, and the ustadz also hears it	Santri DA
		Since we are very close, we often exchange mockery	Santri MW
		The ustadz sometimes gets angry and uses harsh language, including mockery	Santri Ulumuddin
		Some ustadz use harsh words for discipline, but they do not physically hit	Santri DA
2	Physical Violence	Physical punishment is now prohibited; we mostly use push-ups or squat jumps	Ustadz Ulumuddin
		Senior students from the same region sometimes discipline juniors physically	Administrator of Mustafiyah
		Each regional organization prohibits violence, though it still occasionally occurs	Ustadz Mustafiyah
		A boarding teacher used to punish by hitting with sandals and making students stand in the sun	Administrator of Almuslimun
		We no longer permit physical punishment, though changing old habits is difficult	Administrator of Almuslimun
3	Sexual Violence	In the past, we expelled the teacher involved in sexual violence	Administrator of DA
		There was an incident which initially seemed due to closeness but involved sexual misconduct	Ustadz Almuslimun
		I heard about it from senior students, but I haven't seen it firsthand	Santri Mustafawyah
		In the past, the ustadz involved in sexual misconduct was expelled by the leadership	Alumni Mustafawiyah
		A senior student committed sodomy in the dormitory; both the perpetrator and victim were expelled	Alumni Ulumuddin

Based on Table 3 and qualitative analysis of the collected data, three primary forms of violence experienced by students in pesantren have been identified:

1.1. **Verbal/Psychological Violence**: Data reveals that verbal or psychological abuse is prevalent. Respondents reported experiences of mockery, both personal and directed at their parents, as well as insults from peers, seniors, and even educators. This form of violence impacts students' mental health, leading to negative effects such as feelings of worthlessness, anxiety, and depression. Verbal abuse often goes unresolved and is perceived as normal, potentially escalating to physical violence.

1.2. **Physical Violence**: The findings indicate that physical violence remains common in pesantren despite being banned by regulations. Physical punishment, including hitting, slapping, or other forms of violence, is still practiced. This violence is also inflicted by senior students responsible for organizing activities.

1.3. **Sexual Harassment and Violence**: The most alarming finding is the occurrence of sexual harassment and violence. Data indicates awareness of such incidents, although respondents are often reluctant to discuss them. This secrecy might be an attempt to protect victims from exploitation. Historical accounts reveal that sexual violence.

2. Factors Contributing to Violence in Pesantren

Our analysis identifies several factors contributing to the persistence of violence against children in pesantren:

Table 3 Factors Contributing to Violence

No	Category	Cause of Violence	Source
1	Lack of Monitoring System	Monitoring is reactive rather than preventive	Observation
2	Seniority Hierarchy	Senior students demand respect and often abuse their authority	Santri Ulumuddin/ Mustafawiyah
		Senior students are given roles to educate juniors, which sometimes leads to abuse	Administrator of Mustafawiyah/ Administrator of Ulumuddin
3	Recruitment of Teachers without Psychological Testing	Many alumni teach without psychological testing	Administrator of Mustafawiyah/ Pengelola Ulumuddin/ Administrator of DA
		93% of teachers are alumni	Document Study
		Familiarity with candidates and understanding of pesantren culture	Administrator of DA/ Administrator of Ulumuddin
		No psychological tests for prospective teachers	Recruitment Document Study
4	Insufficient Sanctions and Legal Enforcement	Minor cases result in verbal warnings, while serious cases involve parental warnings	Administrator of Mustafawiyah
		Violence cases are resolved informally, without police involvement	Administrator of Almuslimun
		Fear of public scandal if cases are reported to authorities	Administrator of Mustafawiyah/ Administrator of Almuslimun
5	Lack of Accessible Reporting System	No complaint boxes are provided	Pengelola DA
		Students report violence only to ustadz	Administrator of Ulumuddin
		No child-friendly school training is provided	Administrator of Almuslimun
		Lack of visible reporting system	Observation

The identified causes of violence in pesantren include:

2.1. **Lack of Monitoring System**: The absence of a comprehensive monitoring system in pesantren means that violence often goes unnoticed. The current reactive monitoring is insufficient for preventing abuse, creating an environment where harmful behaviors continue unchecked.

2.2. **Seniority Hierarchy**: The seniority hierarchy among students contributes to violence, with older students often misusing their authority over younger ones. This hierarchy perpetuates a culture of violence, as junior students may be reluctant to report abuses.

2.3. **Recruitment Without Psychological Testing**: Effective recruitment of teachers and ustadz is crucial for safeguarding students. The lack of psychological testing during recruitment and inadequate background checks on candidates can result in hiring individuals unsuited for the role, potentially allowing those with a history of violence to become educators.

2.4. **Insufficient Sanctions and Legal Enforcement**: Weak sanctions and legal enforcement for perpetrators of violence create a lack of deterrence. There is a tendency to resolve incidents informally, avoiding legal involvement which could otherwise provide justice for victims and prevent further abuse.

2.5. **Lack of Accessible Reporting System**: An effective reporting system is essential for preventing and addressing violence. The absence of accessible and functional reporting mechanisms hinders the ability of students to

report violence, thus impeding efforts to address and eliminate it.

3. Efforts of Pesantren to Protect Children from Violence

Despite the significant challenges related to violence against children in pesantren, this study also highlights several measures and strategies implemented by pesantren administrators to protect students, as outlined in Table 4.

Table 4 Efforts of Pesantren to Protect Children from Violence

No	Category	Protective Measures	Source
1	Minimizing Senior Roles	Senior students are no longer involved in mentoring juniors and focus on their studies	Administrator of Almuslimun
		Selection of leaders is based on a track record, with nominees chosen by students	Administrator of Almuslimun
		Senior students are prohibited from entering the dormitories of first-year students, with security provided	Administrator of Almuslimun
2	Socialization to Teachers	During meetings, physical punishment is declared unacceptable	Administrator of Mustafawiyah
		Circulars are issued to all teachers prohibiting physical punishment	Administrator of Mustafawiyah
		Organizational rules mandate the prohibition of physical violence	Administrator of Mustafawiyah
		Contracts are signed to ensure adherence to non-violence policies	Santri Organization Administrators
3	Encouraging Reporting	Students are encouraged to report violence to ustadz or dormitory teachers	Administrator of Almuslimun
4	Contracts with Students and Parents	Contracts are signed with parents, stating that students will be expelled if involved in violence	Administrator of Almuslimun

The efforts undertaken by pesantren to reduce violence include:

3.1 Minimizing Senior Roles: Recognizing that violence is often perpetrated by senior students against juniors, pesantren have implemented measures to reduce the involvement of senior students in the mentorship of juniors. This approach aims to break the cycle of violence perpetuated through seniority.

3.2 Socialization to Teachers on Non-Violent Discipline: As physical punishment is deemed outdated, pesantren have proactively communicated and enforced policies against such practices. This includes regular meetings with teachers to reinforce the prohibition of physical discipline and implementing clear organizational rules against violence.

3.3 Encouraging Students to Report Violence to Teachers Although: a formal reporting system has not yet been established, the management encourages students who experience violence to report it to their teachers. Students are informed about this during orientation at the beginning of their time at the pesantren. Teachers also regularly remind students to report any incidents of violence to them. Additionally, students are encouraged to report such incidents to their dormitory supervisors.

3.4 Implementing a Contract with Students and Parents: at the start of the academic year, the pesantren gathers parents or guardians to communicate key rules that must be adhered to by the students. One important aspect is the signing of a statement agreeing that the student may be expelled if they engage in violent behavior. This contract is intended to prevent students from committing acts of violence. It also serves as a reminder for parents to guide their children to refrain from such behavior. The statement clearly outlines that both the student and the parents agree to the possibility of expulsion if violence occurs.

Discussion

Pesantren which are often viewed as solutions to character education challenges, have ironically seen numerous cases of violence. This research highlights that violence does occur within these institutions, manifesting in three forms: verbal, physical, and sexual (Francia & Edling, 2017; UNESCO, 2019). Currently, the response of many Islamic boarding schools is predominantly repressive, focusing solely on punishing perpetrators without implementing comprehensive strategies to address the issue (Edling et al., 2021). Moreover, many perpetrators are not subjected to legal proceedings; Instead, cases are often resolved through informal agreements (family settlements) between the perpetrator and the victim. This approach is driven by concerns that legal action would damage the pesantren's reputation, but it also results in the neglect of justice for the victims. Additionally, students who experience violence often do not receive appropriate interventions to address their trauma. Verbal and psychological abuse is frequently

normalized within pesantren, despite being the initial step toward more severe forms of violence if left unaddressed.

The violence experienced by students in pesantren reflects a significant gap in the ability of pesantren management to fully protect them. From the leadership to the teachers (both classroom and dormitory), the management has not yet succeeded in providing a safe and secure environment for the students. The efforts to protect students have not been demonstrated with the seriousness expected from those responsible. Such violence can lead to profound trauma for the students. Furthermore, children who experience violence may suffer from diminished cognitive abilities and lower academic performance (Mennen et al., 2022; Pfeiffer & Pinquart, 2014).

The occurrence of violence in pondok pesantren may stem from the administrators' belief that such incidents are a legitimate part of the educational process. They may also consider these occurrences as commonplace. Furthermore, the management often lacks an effective preventive system, leading to recurrent incidents of violence. Administrators might perceive these events as rare or less significant, leading to inadequate oversight (Kowalski & Morgan, 2017). Weak supervision by dormitory managers and insufficient collaboration between parents and teachers further exacerbate the issue (Simon & Olson, 2014). Parents may believe their responsibility ends upon enrolling their children in pondok pesantren.

While research on violence in pondok pesantren has identified types, causes, and mitigation strategies, existing studies predominantly focus on the positive aspects of these institutions (Chang et al., 2023; Izfanna & Hisyam, 2012; Patriadi et al., 2015). This study aims to reveal the management practices in addressing violence and highlight the weaknesses in their approach.

Given the research findings on violence and its causes, continuous oversight is essential moving forward. Additionally, there is a need for ongoing training and capacity building on violence prevention for all stakeholders within pondok pesantren. The urgent implementation and dissemination of the Minister of State for Women's Empowerment and Child Protection Regulation No. 8 of 2014 on Child-Friendly School Policies and the Director-General of Islamic Education's Decree No. 1262 of 2024 on Technical Guidelines for Child-Friendly Guidance in Pondok Pesantren are crucial. Pondok pesantren should establish counseling programs for victims of violence. Fundamentally, the management of these institutions needs to develop a comprehensive child protection system to prevent the recurrence of violence.

Educational institutions must regard children as subjects rather than objects. Children should actively participate in efforts to prevent violence within these institutions. Involving students in violence prevention is crucial for creating a safe and supportive learning environment. Involving children in the prevention of violence within pesantren not only empowers the students but also fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility in creating a safe and supportive learning environment. By valuing the voices of students and actively engaging them in violence prevention efforts, pesantren can drive positive change and move away from a culture of violence. This involvement also positively impacts oversight, enhancing the effectiveness of monitoring and ensuring a more protective environment for all students.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study underscore the prevalence of violence in pesantren. A significant aspect of this research highlights that violence against students often stems from a flawed educational paradigm. There is a prevailing belief that violence is a tradition, or even an integral part, of the educational process in pesantren. This misconception contributes to the normalization of abusive practices within these institutions. The study reveals that violence is perpetrated not only by teachers (ustadz) but also by senior students. The management of pondok pesantren has yet to eliminate the seniority culture, which serves as a critical point of violence initiation.

This analysis serves as a concrete call to address the pervasive issue of violence in pondok pesantren by advocating for structural changes, enhancing oversight mechanisms, and shifting the culture that regards violence as a component of educational practice. Urgent actions are essential to ensure the safety and protection of children, necessitating proactive strategies, strict policy enforcement, and educational interventions to create a secure and conducive learning environment. The immediate implementation of Child-Friendly School-Pesantren policies across all pondok pesantren is crucial.

This study is limited to the perspective of pondok pesantren on the island of Sumatra and does

not encompass institutions on Java Island, which serves as a benchmark for pesantren education in Indonesia. Expanding the research to include Java would provide a more comprehensive view. Additionally, the use of qualitative methods alone should be complemented with mixed methods research to yield a more thorough understanding of the issue.

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