


The Meaning of Psychological Security for Students in the Implementation of Child-Friendly Islamic Boarding Schools

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the meaning of psychological safety for santri in the context of the implementation of the Pesantren Sharing and Care (PSP) program carried out by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Sumenep Regency. The background of this study is the increasing awareness of the importance of creating a pesantren environment that is not only religious but also child-friendly and supportive of the psychosocial well-being of santri. Using a qualitative approach with a case study method, data was collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentary studies at two boarding schools targeted by the PSP program. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis. The research findings revealed four main themes related to psychological safety: (1) feeling safe to speak up and express opinions without fear of punishment, (2) the development of empathetic relationships between students and caregivers, (3) the importance of physical spaces that support emotional comfort, such as counseling rooms and gardens, and (4) challenges posed by seniority culture and hidden violence that still persist. The PSP program plays a significant role in creating a more open, participatory, and caring environment that addresses the emotional needs of students. However, achieving a comprehensive transformation of values requires time, continuous evaluation, and structural and cultural support from all elements of the boarding school.

Keywords: *Psychological Safety, Santri (Students), Child Friendly Boarding School, Sharing And Caring Boarding School*

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INTRODUCTION

Pesantren as a traditional Islamic educational institution has become an integral part of the education system and character formation in Indonesia. In the midst of this strategic role, there is a need to present an Islamic boarding school environment that is not only religious, but also safe and friendly to children's growth and development. One of the aspects that is now of concern is the importance of psychological safety for students, which is a condition where they feel emotionally safe to express their opinions, raise problems, and be themselves without fear of being punished or humiliated (Edmondson, 1999). In line with that, Muspitasari et al. (2024) found that emotional intelligence and social support from peers significantly contributed to the subjective well-being of adolescents in pesantren. Adolescents who have strong social support are better able to adapt emotionally to the dormitory environment and the pressures of collective life, thus building better psychological resilience.

But in reality, a number of studies show that many students still face psychological pressure due to authoritarian parenting, seniority systems, and lack of space for expression. The study by Riyadi et al. (2024) found that violent practices in the pesantren environment, both verbal and physical, often occur in hierarchical relationships between caregivers and students or fellow students, which has a negative impact on the psychological condition of students.

In response to this problem, the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia issued Decree of the Minister of Religion (KMA) Number 91 of 2025 concerning the Roadmap for the Child-Friendly Islamic Boarding School Development Program. This policy is an important

milestone in mainstreaming child protection in the religious education environment with a more humanistic and psychological approach. This roadmap emphasizes the importance of teacher training in empathic communication, violence reporting systems, and strengthening counseling and psychosocial support in Islamic boarding schools. Research by Dewi et al. (2021) also shows that the psychological well-being of students is greatly influenced by family support, gratitude, and self-acceptance. The combination of these factors has been proven to be able to form emotional resilience in facing the challenges of collective life in Islamic boarding schools. Therefore, the existence of programs that emphasize the affective and psychosocial dimensions is very important to strengthen the effectiveness of child-friendly pesantren policies.

As an implementation of this policy at the local level, the Office of the Ministry of Religion of Sumenep Regency launched the "Pesantren Sharing and Care" program. This program aims to create an emotionally safe space for students through a participatory, dialogical, and reflective approach. The main activities in this program include student deliberation forums, open counseling, caregiver training, and the provision of physical facilities that support psychological calmness and comfort (Sumenepkab, 2025). This effort is in line with previous findings that the physical and social atmosphere of pesantren play a major role in establishing a sense of security and comfort for students (Fitriani et al., 2023). In the context of child protection in Islamic boarding schools, *the Child-Friendly Islamic Boarding School (CFIBS)* model has also been developed as a concrete form of applying humanistic Islamic educational values. Idris et al. (2023) noted that mentoring-based parenting (*musyirif*), curriculum integration that supports child protection values, and internal regulations that favor the psychosocial welfare of students have proven to be effective in reducing the risk of violence and mental stress in Islamic boarding schools. Thus, the launch of the Sharing and Care Islamic Boarding School program in Sumenep Regency can be seen as a form of local adaptation of the national and regional approach to child-friendly Islamic boarding schools.

Furthermore, a prophetic values-based approach in fostering students has been proven to be able to significantly improve their psychological well-being (Khusumadewi et al., 2024). However, there are still limited studies that explicitly explore the meaning of psychological safety from the perspective of the students themselves in the context of child-friendly pesantren programs.

Based on this, this study aims to examine in depth how the meaning of psychological security is understood by students and the extent to which the implementation of the "Pesantren Sharing and Care" program plays a role in creating an atmosphere that supports their psychosocial welfare.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study type. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to understand the subjective experiences and meanings constructed by students related to their psychological safety in the context of child-friendly pesantren. Case studies are best used to answer the "how" and "why" questions of a particular phenomenon in a complex real-life context (Yin, 2018).

This research was conducted in two Islamic boarding schools in Sumenep Regency that were targeted by the socialization of the Sumenep Ministry of Religion's Sharing and Care (PSP) Islamic Boarding School, namely the Assadad Ambunten Sumenep Islamic Boarding School and the Nasyrul Ulum Aengdake Bluto Sumenep Islamic Boarding School. The research informants consisted of students (aged 13–19 years) as the main participants, asatidz pesantren and the PSP program implementation team from the Ministry of Religion of Sumenep Regency. The selection of informants was carried out by *purposive sampling* with consideration of direct involvement and informative capacity for the conflicts and policies being studied (Sugiyono, 2021).

The data collection technique in this study uses a qualitative approach with several methods to explore the phenomenon in depth and comprehensively, namely *in-depth*

interviews with research informants, field observations to directly observe the dynamics of the implementation of the sharing and caring pesantren program, and documentation studies are used to strengthen field findings by examining various official documents and publications. The documents analyzed include the Decree of the Minister of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia Number 91 of 2025 concerning the Roadmap for the Child-Friendly Islamic Boarding School Development Program, Operational Standards for Sharing and Care Islamic Boarding School Procedures and mass media coverage. Documentation studies provide historical, legal, and policy data that enrich the analysis in a triangulative manner (Bowen, 2009).

Data analysis in this study was carried out using *the Thematic Analysis technique*, referring to the systematic stages developed by Braun and Clarke (2021). Thematic analysis was chosen for its flexibility in examining complex social phenomena, as well as its ability to bridge the gap between empirical data and theoretical frameworks (Terry et al., 2017). Thematic analysis is able to organize and extract meaning from qualitative data in depth, especially from the narratives of informants' experiences and perceptions. This method allows the identification of key patterns and themes that emerge from interview, observation, and document data. The validity of the data is guaranteed through the application of four criteria developed by Lincoln and Guba, namely *credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability* (Nowell et al., 2017). By using these criteria, this research is expected to produce findings that are valid, reliable, and scientifically accountable.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

This study identifies four main themes that represent the meaning of psychological safety for students in the implementation of the Sharing and Care (PSP) Islamic Boarding School (PSP) program in Sumenep Regency, namely,

Psychological Security as a Sense of Security to Speak and Speak Out

Students interpret psychological security as the courage to express opinions, complaints, or mistakes without fear of being humiliated or punished. Previously, many of them refrained for fear of being perceived as hostile or less polite.

"I used to keep it to myself if there was a problem. I was once scolded for reporting the violence I experienced. Now I dare to express what I feel, even the ustadzah who asks for an opinion first." Female student, 16 years old (S1)

"If there is a meeting of students, it is different. We were involved, for example, about picket schedules or food. There is a special session for students to talk to the management." Male student, 17 years old (S5)

Asatidz admitted that a more open approach has reduced the tension of relations with students.

"We are taught to start with questions, not commands. So it's not 'what did you do wrong', but 'what can be helped'. It makes the kids more open." Ustadz A, 28 years old (A1)

"They are now not afraid to complain or criticize, knowing we won't get angry right away. The understanding provided in the PSP program really helps two-way communication." Ustadzah M, 36 years old (A2)

The PSP team of the Ministry of Religion Sumenep emphasized that two-way communication is the main principle of child-friendly Islamic boarding schools.

"We have built a dialogue structure for students to be able to voice their opinions, not just listen. This is the foundation of psychological safety." PSP Team of the Ministry of Religion Sumenep (T1)

The finding that students feel more courageous to express their opinions without fear of being scolded reflects an increase in psychological safety. In the context of education, psychological safety allows learners to learn, ask questions, and express opinions without fear or embarrassment, which ultimately increases learning engagement and effectiveness. This is in line with the *theory of psychological safety* which states that security encourages openness

and active participation (Edmondson, 1999). This opinion is also strengthened by the study of Hafnidar et al. (2022) which shows that open and inclusive communication improves the psychological well-being of students in Islamic boarding schools through improving the quality of social relationships.

Psychological Security Is Realized through Empathetic and Non-Judgmental Relationships

A sense of security also arises because caregivers and asatidz are no longer authoritarian and make room for empathy. This approach improves the quality of relationships and strengthens the emotional bond between students and caregivers.

"In the past, I was scolded directly. Now the ustadzah asks first, 'why are you late?' Only then can I explain. I don't feel scared anymore." Female student, 15 years old (S3)

"I was once wrong and afraid of being scolded, but the ustadz said 'it's okay, everyone can be wrong'. It makes me feel appreciated." Male student, 18 years old (S4)

Ustadz and ustadzah also emphasized the importance of changing the communication pattern that occurs between students and students and students with asatidz

"We not only teach, but also listen. When the students confided, we listened first. That's something that used to be rarely done." Ustadzah M, 36 years old (A2)

"After participating in the explanation of the PSP program, I realized that hard does not mean firm. Now we use a more dialogical approach." Ustadz R, 30 years old (A3)

The PSP team of the Ministry of Religion Sumenep stated that this change is the main target of the program carried out

"We give asatidz an understanding of empathic communication. As a result, many students feel more comfortable talking about personal matters." PSP Team of the Ministry of Religion Sumenep (T1)

"This change in communication greatly affects the sense of security of students. They no longer feel 'small' in front of others." PSP Team of the Ministry of Religion Sumenep (T2)

The change in communication patterns from instructive to empathic is decisive for creating a sense of security. When caregivers show care and empathy, students feel valued as individuals, not just objects of discipline. This approach is in line with the findings from Khusumadewi et al. (2024) that communication based on prophetic values can significantly improve the psychological well-being of students.

The implementation of the child-friendly pesantren policy cannot be separated from the role of teachers and caregivers in building healthy emotional interactions. This is in line with the findings of Arbain et al. (2024), which underline that the success of child-friendly schools is greatly influenced by the existence of a culture of mutual respect, two-way communication, and student empowerment in decision-making. In the context of Islamic boarding schools, this approach can be applied through student deliberation forums, a reporting system without intimidation, and caregivers who adopt the role of a companion, not just a behavior controller.

Classical educational traditions such as *talaqqî* and *halaqah* have also proven to be important pathways in building emotional attachment between teachers and students. The study by Ismail et al. (2024) shows that the respectful relationship in this model encourages the psychological and moral development of students in a more holistic manner. Therefore, the Sharing and Care Islamic Boarding School program has great potential to instill these values in the dormitory-based Islamic education culture.

The Role of Supporting Facilities and Safe Spaces in Calming Students' Emotions

Psychological safety is not only related to relationships, but also the support of physical environments such as counseling rooms and open gardens.

"If I'm dizzy or sad, I like to go to the counseling room. I am not afraid of stories because the ustadzah is friendly and the secrets are kept." Female student, 17 years old (S2)

"I was stressed during the memorization exam. I asked for time to sit in the park, it made me very calm." Male student, 17 years old (S5)

Asatidz also uses this space to accompany students.

"We sometimes invite students to chat in the park, so that the atmosphere is more relaxed. That's very effective for the approach." Ustadz A, 28 years old (A1)

"We also use counseling rooms for group reflection, not just personal problems. That's a new way we learned from this program." Ustadzah F, 25 years old (A4)

The PSP team of the Ministry of Religion Sumenep ensures that the facility not only exists, but is also actively used

"Children need space to pause and be alone. That's part of psychological security that is often forgotten." PSP Team of the Ministry of Religion Sumenep (T2)

Physical environments such as counseling rooms and gardens as places of reflection also play an important role. Research shows that space design that takes into account adolescent psychology can help reduce emotional distress and improve mood. These results reinforce the findings (Fitriani et al., 2023), that the design of spaces that are psychologically friendly to adolescents supports emotional safety in the pesantren environment. A safe and child-friendly physical environment is also one of the main indicators in the Ministry of Religion's version of the Child-Friendly Islamic Boarding School Roadmap as contained in KMA No. 91 of 2025. Machfudz (2024) shows that the psychoeducational approach based on Islamic values through group counseling is effective in improving the mental health of students. This approach places the musyrif and peers as the initial protectors, in line with the participatory spirit in the Sharing and Care Islamic Boarding School program.

Emotional support has also been proven to play an important role in increasing the psychological resilience of students. A study by Rahmadi et al. (2024) found that a trusted relationship between students and ustadz or fellow peers contributes greatly to their learning success and psychological well-being. The main dimensions of this support include trustworthy guidance, a space to express feelings without fear, and recognition of the existence and emotional needs of students. These findings reinforce the importance of the presence of counseling rooms, empathic communication, and open reporting systems in creating a safe and psychologically supportive pesantren climate.

Culture Barriers, Seniority and Covert Violence

Although many positive changes have occurred, a culture of seniority and verbal abuse is still a challenge in the dormitory environment.

"In the dormitory, there are still upperclassmen who like to yell if we are slow or disobedient. But now we can report." Male student, 16 years old (S6)

"I was once scolded for taking the wrong ablution. Now I know that I can tell the ustadzah." Female student, 15 years old (S3)

Asatidz acknowledges that the transformation of values is not yet completely evenly distributed:

"We need time to change the old habits of senior students. There are still those who think that it is a form of education." Ustadz R, 30 years old (A3)

"We have started to educate about bullying, but not all students understand the limits of joking and harassment." Ustadzah M, 36 years old (A2)

The PSP team of the Ministry of Religion Sumenep realizes that this aspect needs further strengthening so that it can have a maximum impact

"Violence is not always physical. Sometimes it's verbal and social, and that's actually harder to track. Because a lot of seniors in the dormitory do." PSP Team of the Ministry of Religion Sumenep (T1)

"This culture cannot be changed overnight. But we already have an anonymous reporting system and a reflection forum to help accelerate change." PSP Team of the Ministry of Religion Sumenep (T2)

The culture of seniority is still a serious challenge because it creates power imbalances between students, which has the potential to cause covert psychological violence. This is strengthened by the findings of Sulastrri et al. (2024) who show that seniority practices in pesantren are often motivated by the desire to retaliate against previous senior treatment and show dominance, as well as have an impact on the psychological discomfort of students.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of the research, it can be concluded that the meaning of psychological security for students includes feeling emotionally safe to express thoughts, express complaints, and be themselves without fear of punishment or social rejection. Through the Pesantren Sharing and Care (PSP) program implemented by the Ministry of Religion of Sumenep Regency, there has been a significant shift in the culture of communication and nurturing in the pesantren environment, where students feel more appreciated because they are given space to speak up, are involved in decision-making, and gain access to counseling services. The empathic approach of *asatidz* and the support of physical facilities such as counseling rooms also contribute positively to the psychological comfort of students, although challenges still exist, especially related to the culture of seniority and verbal violence that persists in some dormitory areas. Therefore, psychological safety in pesantren can be said to be the result of dynamic interactions between healthy interpersonal relationships, supportive institutional structures, and a child-friendly environment. Based on these findings, it is recommended that pesantren managers continue to strengthen the culture of open and child-friendly communication through continuous training to *asatidz* on non-authoritarian and empathetic approaches, build an effective and reliable violence reporting system, and ensure the availability of safe spaces for students to reflect and submit their complaints. The Ministry of Religious Affairs as the initiator of the PSP program should expand the scope of implementation to other pesantren by including special modules that deal with seniority culture and covert forms of violence, as well as conducting periodic evaluations and intensive mentoring to ensure that changes in values and behaviors are truly internalized in pesantren life. Finally, for future researchers, it is recommended to conduct a longitudinal study to see the long-term impact of child-friendly pesantren programs on the mental health and psychosocial well-being of students in various pesantren contexts in Indonesia.

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