



Mitigating the Impact of Violence Against Children in *Pondok Pesantren* in East Java: Strengthening Human Resources in Anticipating Child Abuse

Titik Triwulan Tutik¹, Agus Aditoni², Zainatul Ilmiyah³
^{1,2,3}Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya, Indonesia
titik_tt@uinsa.ac.id¹

Corresponding Author: Titik Triwulan Tutik Email: titik_tt@uinsa.ac.id	Article history: Received: January 22, 2026 Revised: June 05, 2026 Available Online: July 10, 2026.
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Abstract

Violence against children remains a critical global issue with significant social, psychological, and legal implications for educational institutions. In Indonesia, Islamic boarding schools (pondok pesantren) face increasing scrutiny as cases of neglect, psychological abuse, and physical violence emerge amidst limited supervisory and reporting mechanisms. This community service project (pengabdian kepada masyarakat) aims to strengthen the awareness and capacity of pesantren human resources (HR)—including kiai, pengasuh, school managers, ustadz, and ustazah (teachers), as well as student mentors—to anticipate and mitigate child abuse within educational environments. Activities were conducted in Malang, Kediri, and Blitar Regencies through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), interviews, deliberative forums, and dialogic workshops. In Malang, 25 participants from 11 pesantren across five sub-districts participated, while in Kediri–Blitar, 30 participants from five sub-districts attended the sessions. This article presents the conceptual framework, methodological approach, empirical findings, and implications for institutional strengthening. The study concludes that increasing HR awareness, training in early detection, establishment of standard operating procedures (SOPs), and multi-stakeholder collaboration are essential strategies for mitigating violence against children in pesantren.

Keywords: *child protection; community service; human resource capacity; institutional strengthening; prevention and mitigation; violence against children.*

INTRODUCTION

Violence against children constitutes a multidimensional crisis that affects physical safety, emotional well-being, educational outcomes, and long-term social functioning.¹ Child abuse may take the form of physical punishment, psychological intimidation, neglect, exploitation, or sexual violence. International frameworks such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Sustainable Development Goals emphasize the obligation of educational institutions—formal and non-formal—to provide safe, protective, and nurturing environments for children.²

In Indonesia, pondok pesantren serve as unique educational ecosystems blending religious instruction, character formation, and communal living. Historically, pesantren have maintained strong traditions of moral discipline, spiritual formation, and a family-like environment under the guidance of *kiai* and *ustadz*. However, rapid modernization, demographic shifts, and varied management quality have challenged pesantren's ability to maintain safe learning environments. Recent studies indicate that although pesantren continue to play a vital role in Islamic education, the absence of standardized child safeguarding policies, limited institutional capacity, and inconsistent implementation of child protection mechanisms increase the vulnerability of santri to physical, psychological, and sexual violence.³

East Java—one of the provinces with the highest number of pesantren—presents both challenges and opportunities. The regions of Malang, Kediri, and Blitar host hundreds of pesantren, ranging from small *salaf* institutions to large, modern boarding schools. Yet many still lack structured reporting systems, HR training, or institutional governance that aligns with child protection standards.

In response, a structured community service program was conducted to strengthen HR capacity in preventing violence against children. This paper synthesizes the results of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), interviews, deliberation sessions, and consultative workshops conducted from January to July. Stakeholders included pesantren caretakers, government officials, and child-protection professionals.

¹ Deborah Fry et al., "The relationships between violence in childhood and educational outcomes: A global systematic review and meta-analysis," *Child Abuse & Neglect* 75, no. 1 (2018): 6–28. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2017.06.021>;

² Sorayab Lester et al., "What do we know about preventing school violence? A systematic review of systematic reviews," *Psychology, Health & Medicine* 22, no. 1 (2017): 187–223. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13548506.2017.1282616>

³ Abdul Kholik et al., "Developing a Strategic Model of Child-Friendly Pesantren Climate to Prevent Sexual Violence," *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 13, no. 3 (2015): 1831–1858. <https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v13i3.2008>

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework of this community service program is grounded in several interrelated theoretical perspectives that explain why violence occurs in educational institutions, how pesantren culture shapes human-resource behavior, and what strategies are effective for mitigating violence against children in Islamic boarding schools. The framework integrates theories of child protection, the ecology of learning environments, behavior change communication, community-based intervention, and capacity-building in religious institutions. Presented descriptively, this framework serves as the intellectual foundation for analyzing field findings from Malang, Kediri, and Blitar.

Child Protection and the Ecology of Violence

Efforts to mitigate violence against children in pesantren rely heavily on the broader body of literature on child protection and the ecological systems model. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory posits that a child's development is shaped by multiple environmental layers that interact simultaneously—the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem.⁴ In a pesantren context, the boarding environment acts as the child's primary microsystem. The ways teachers discipline students, the peer culture, communal living arrangements, and the authority of the *kiai* significantly influence how children experience safety, discipline, and emotional well-being.

The ecological model helps explain why violence emerges in pesantren: not merely because of individual misconduct, but because of cultural norms, systemic practices, and institutional dynamics. Studies on school-based violence indicate that hierarchical structures, power imbalance, and normalization of punitive discipline contribute to the persistence of harmful practices.⁵ This perspective guides the program's approach, which focuses not only on individual awareness but on transforming institutional norms and structures.

Pesantren as a Socio-Religious Learning System

Pesantren are unique educational ecosystems that combine religious learning, character formation, and communal living. Scholars of Islamic education emphasize that pesantren operate through the interrelated authority of the *kiai*, the transmission of classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*), and a communal culture that cultivates discipline, obedience, and moral

⁴ Sarah Lindstrom Johnson, "Improving the School Environment to Reduce School Violence: A Review of the Literature." *Journal of School Health* 79, no. 10 (2009): 451–465. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1746-1561.2009.00435.x>

⁵ Jun Sung Hong & Dorothy L Espelage, "A review of research on bullying and peer victimization in school: An ecological system analysis," *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 17, no. 4 (2012): 311–322. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2012.03.003>

responsibility among *santri*.⁶ These distinctive institutional characteristics require child-protection initiatives to be culturally sensitive, aligning safeguarding policies with Islamic educational values, the leadership of *kiai*, and the social traditions of pesantren to ensure greater acceptance and sustainability.⁷

Three aspects of pesantren culture are critical for understanding the phenomenon of child violence: *First*, normative religious authority. The *kiai* holds ultimate moral and institutional authority. Organizational change depends heavily on his endorsement. Child-protection awareness must therefore be framed in religious and ethical terms, aligning with the pesantren's worldview. *Second*, tradition-Based pedagogy. Some disciplinary practices are inherited from long-standing traditions. While many are benign, some may be incompatible with contemporary child-protection standards. Change requires cultural dialogue rather than confrontation. *Third*, resource limitation. Many pesantren lack trained counselors, psychologists, or social workers. Limited human and financial resources create structural barriers to safe learning environments.⁸ Understanding these dynamics is essential for designing interventions that are both effective and culturally acceptable.

Capacity Building and Human-Resource Strengthening

The conceptual framework also draws from capacity-building theory, which highlights the importance of developing knowledge, skills, and institutional commitment.⁹ In the pesantren context, this involves improving teachers' understanding of: child development and emotional needs, the psychological impact of violence, non-violent disciplinary strategies, legal frameworks for child protection, and effective institutional reporting systems.

Technical knowledge alone is insufficient; capacity-building also requires empowering pesantren personnel to take collective responsibility for protecting students. Participatory approaches—such as Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), community dialogues, and collaborative workshops—align with the understanding that sustainable institutional change emerges from within the community itself.

⁶ Mohammad Muchlis Solichin, "Interrelation Kiai Authorities, Curriculum and Learning Culture in Pesantren Indonesia," *TARBIYA: Journal of Education in Muslim Society* 5, no. 1 (June 2018): 86–100. <https://doi.org/10.15408/tjems.v5i1.7781>

⁷ Muhammad Ilham Nadlifuddin, "Child-Friendly Pesantren Concept: A Strategic Approach to Empowering Children's Rights," *Santri: Journal of Pesantren and Fiqh Sosial* 5, no. 2 (2014): 169–184. <https://doi.org/10.35878/santri.v5i2.1395>

⁸ Hidayatulla Azra, "Islamic Education in Indonesia," In N. Abdullah (Ed.), *Handbook of Islamic Education* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2017), 95–117. DOI:10.1007/978-3-319-53620-0_32-1

⁹ Charles Lusthaus et al., *Organizational assessment: A framework for improving performance* (New York: International Development Research Centre/Inter-American Development Bank, 2002)

Behavior Change and Social Learning in Educational Institutions

Efforts to reduce violence require not only knowledge but behavioral transformation. Bandura's social learning theory demonstrates that behavior is shaped by observing models, internalizing norms, and receiving reinforcement.¹⁰ In pesantren, teachers and senior students serve as influential role models. Because pesantren life is communal and routine-driven, behavioral norms spread quickly, whether positive or negative.

This framework implies that effective mitigation must: highlight positive role models, encourage teachers to model non-violent discipline, promote peer-based reinforcement of safe behavior, and cultivate institutional norms that discourage harmful disciplinary practices.

Behavior Change Communication (BCC) strategies, widely used in social interventions, emphasize the importance of culturally relevant messages, participatory communication, and community reinforcement to achieve sustainable behavioral change.¹¹ In pesantren, these communication strategies resonate with Islamic educational traditions, where religious narratives emphasizing *rahmah* (compassion), ethical conduct, and respect for human dignity function as persuasive instruments for shaping values, strengthening social acceptance, and fostering positive behavioral transformation among *santri*.¹²

Institutional Governance and Reporting Mechanisms

Violence in educational institutions is often perpetuated by the absence of clear governance systems. Organizational management literature in child-protection institutions stresses the importance of Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), structured reporting mechanisms, and designated protection officers.¹³ Many pesantren do not yet have such systems, making cases of violence difficult to detect, document, or resolve.

The conceptual framework, therefore, includes: simple and accessible reporting tools, internal committees for monitoring and response, clear communication channels, and collaborative oversight involving both pesantren leaders and external stakeholders. These structural elements help

¹⁰ Albert Bandura. *Social Learning Theory* (Michigan: Prentice-Hall, 1977); Razieh Tadayon Nabavi & Mohammad Sadegh Bijandi, "Bandura's Social Learning Theory & Social Cognitive Learning Theory," *a literature review study on Social Learning Theory (SLT) and Social Cognitive Learning Theory (SCLT)* (January 2012). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/267750204_Bandura's_Social_Learning_Theory_Social_Cognitive_Learning_Theory

¹¹ Tri Hastuti Nur Rochimah et al., "Behavior Change Communication: Family and Community Approaches," *Jurnal Komunikator* 13, no. 1 (2021): 89–100. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18196/jkm.131053>

¹² Andri Kurniawan et al., "Prophetic Communication and the Formation of Pesantren Habitus: A Structural Functionalism Perspective," *Al-Insyiroh: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 12, no. 1 (March 2026): 37–54. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.35309/alinsyiroh.v12i1.646>

¹³ Samuel Ngigi & Doreen Nekesa Busolo, "Behaviour Change Communication in Health Promotion: Appropriate Practices and Promising Approaches," *International Journal of Innovative Research and Development* 7, no. 9 (September 2018): 84–93. DOI: 10.24940/ijird/2018/v7/i9/SEP18027

transform child protection from individual awareness into institutional responsibility.

Community-Based and Culturally Grounded Mitigation Strategies

Community-based intervention theory asserts that social change is most effective when rooted in local values, participatory engagement, and culturally resonant practices.¹⁴ Within the Indonesian context, pesantren function as community-based institutions whose educational and social transformation is strengthened through active community participation, Islamic ethical values, and locally embedded leadership. Consequently, initiatives promoting child protection and institutional change are more likely to succeed when grounded in *ukhuwah*, *rahmah*, collective deliberation (*musyawarah*), and the moral authority of religious leaders.¹⁵

The program uses: theological framing (e.g., *hifz al-nafs, tarbiyah bi al-rifq*), testimonies from respected *kiai*, dialogic problem-solving, and collective reflection on real cases. These approaches ensure that child-protection concepts are not seen as “external” or “Western,” but as aligned with Islamic moral commitments.

Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration

Child protection benefits from collaborative governance involving government institutions, professionals, and religious leaders.¹⁶ In the context of Indonesian *pesantren*, effective child protection requires coordinated collaboration among the Ministry of Religious Affairs, child protection agencies, psychologists, educational institutions, and pesantren leaders to strengthen prevention, reporting mechanisms, institutional capacity, and child safeguarding practices. Such cross-sector collaboration bridges national policy standards with local religious and educational practices, thereby creating a more integrated and sustainable child protection system.¹⁷

Such collaboration ensures: legitimacy of child-protection initiatives, provision of expert knowledge, and sustainability of institutional improvements over time.

¹⁴ Robert Chambers, *Whose Reality Counts? Putting The First Last* (London: Intermediate Technology Publications, 1997)

¹⁵ Abdul Muiz et al., “Advancing Sustainable Economic Empowerment in Pesantren by Community-Based Development Theory,” *IQTISHODUNA: Jurnal Ekonomi Islam* 14, no. 1 (April 2015): 357–368. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54471/iqtishoduna.v14i1.1803>; Samsu Samsu et al., “Community Empowerment in Leading Pesantren: A Research of Nyai's Leadership,” *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education* 10, no. 4 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.11591/ijere.v10i4.21833>

¹⁶ Chris Ansell & Alison Gash, “Collaborative Governance in Theory and Practice,” *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 18, no. 4 (October 2008): 543–571. DOI: 10.1093/jopart/mum032

¹⁷ Mustiqowati Ummul Fithriyyah et al., “Collaborative Governance Approach in Prevention of Sexual Violence Against Children in Islamic Boarding School,” *HUMANISMA: Journal of Gender Studies* 9, no. 1 (June 2024): 80–94. <https://doi.org/10.30983/humanisma.v9i1.9250>; Anang Sugeng Cahyono et al., “Collaborative Governance dalam Pelayanan Perlindungan Anak di Indonesia,” *Jurnal Indonesia Sosial Teknologi* 4, no. 3 (April 2023): 340–357. <https://doi.org/10.59141/jist.v4i3.601>

METHODE

This community service program used a descriptive qualitative method designed to portray the real conditions, challenges, and perspectives of pesantren stakeholders regarding child protection. Data were collected through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), semi-structured interviews, informal conversations, and participatory observation during workshops conducted in Malang, Kediri, and Blitar Regencies. A total of 55 participants—*kiai*, administrators, teachers, and student mentors—were involved. The descriptive approach was chosen to present findings naturally as they emerged, without statistical analysis, enabling a holistic understanding of institutional needs and safeguarding awareness.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings from community service activities conducted in three regencies—Malang, Kediri, and Blitar—followed by an analytical discussion grounded in relevant theories and literature. The findings were derived from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), semi-structured interviews, open-ended conversations, and participatory observation involving *kiai*, administrators, teachers, caregivers, and student mentors from 21 pesantren.¹⁸ The analysis is descriptive, reflecting patterns, themes, and institutional insights that emerged during the program.

Limited Awareness of Child Protection Norms in Pesantren

Across Malang, Kediri, and Blitar, participants largely acknowledged that awareness of child-protection norms remains limited among pesantren personnel. Many ustadz–ustadzah expressed that disciplinary practices—such as verbal reprimands, physical gestures of correction, or rigid authority—are historically normalized as part of pesantren educational culture. In several FGDs, participants emphasized that strict discipline has long been perceived as essential to maintaining order, instilling moral values, and ensuring obedience.

Several educators admitted they were unaware that some commonly used disciplinary methods could be classified as psychological or emotional violence under Indonesian child-protection law. Others expressed confusion about what constitutes appropriate versus inappropriate disciplinary actions.¹⁹ This reflects a broader pattern: while educators possess strong moral

¹⁸ Titik Triwulan Tutik et al., “Mitigasi Dampak Kekerasan Terhadap Anak pada Lembaga Pendidikan Pondok Pesantren di Jawa Timur,” *Academic Report on Child-, Gender-, and Disability-Friendly Community Service – Institute for Community Service (LPM), UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya, 2025*. Unpublished

¹⁹ Silfia Asningtias & Waraporn Tongjean, “Teacher professional development in Indonesia: A comparative study with global practices,” in Irena Maureen, Elly Imah, Siti Savira, Syafi’ul Anam, Masilva Mael, & Lina Hartanti (Eds), *Innovation on Education and Social Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2022): 89-95. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1201/9781003265061>. Open Access: www.taylorfrancis.com, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license

commitment and care for students (*santri*), they often lack structured knowledge about violence indicators, developmental psychology, and trauma responses.

These findings reinforce the literature on violence in educational settings, which indicates that lack of awareness is one of the strongest predictors of harmful disciplinary practices.²⁰ Traditional boarding schools often reproduce inherited pedagogical norms without critical evaluation of their long-term psychological impact. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory underscores that children's development is deeply shaped by proximal interactions within their microsystem environments—including school and teachers.²¹ When educators lack awareness, the microsystem can unintentionally become a site of normalized violence.

The findings also align with Dhofier's observation that pesantren operate based on long-standing traditions where authority, discipline, and obedience are culturally embedded.²² Without adequate exposure to contemporary child-protection frameworks, these norms often remain unquestioned.

Cultural Resistance and the Central Role of Religious Authority

FGDs revealed varying levels of cultural resistance toward new child-protection concepts, especially those perceived as “Western,” “secular,” or inconsistent with pesantren values. Some participants feared that external interventions might interfere with traditional authority patterns or reduce educators' disciplinary power. However, this resistance diminished significantly when discussions were framed using Islamic ethical principles—such as *rahmah* (compassion), *amanah* (trust), *hifz al-nafs* (preservation of life), and Qur'anic narratives about gentle teaching.

Participants consistently noted that the endorsement of the *kiai* is the “gateway” to acceptance. When *kiai* supported the program, ustadz–ustadzah became highly engaged. In contrast, where leadership involvement was minimal, participation became hesitant or symbolic.

These findings demonstrate the critical influence of religious authority on cultural receptivity. Azra (2012) and Steenbrink (1999) note that pesantren are highly centralized moral communities where the *kiai* embodies spiritual, social, and educational authority. Change is most effective when it flows from the top.²³

²⁰ Paulo Sérgio de M.S. Pinheiro, *World Report on Violence Against Children* (Geneva: United Nations, 2006).

²¹ Urie Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1979).

²² Zamarkasy Dhofier, *The Pesantren Tradition: The Role of The Kyai in The Maintenance of Traditional Islam in Java* (Yogyakarta: LP3ES, 1999)

²³ Hidayatulla Azra, “Islamic Education in Indonesia,” In N. Abdullah (Ed.), *Handbook of Islamic Education* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2017), 95–117. DOI:10.1007/978-3-319-53620-0_32-1; Karel A. Steenbrink, *Pesantren, Madrasah, Sekolah: Pendidikan Islam dalam Kurun Modern* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1999);

The resistance observed corresponds with studies showing that educational reforms frequently encounter resistance when they are perceived as incompatible with institutional culture and long-established educational traditions. In contrast, reforms that preserve the cultural identity of pesantren while integrating contemporary needs are more readily accepted.²⁴ Likewise, the rapid decline in resistance after child-protection messages were framed through Islamic ethics supports the effectiveness of culturally grounded interventions. This finding is consistent with community-based development approaches, which emphasize that sustainable social change emerges when new initiatives are rooted in local values, religious traditions, and community participation rather than imposed through external norms.²⁵

Structural Limitations: Lack of SOP, Reporting Mechanisms, and Documentation

One of the most critical findings concerns the absence of Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), reporting pathways, or child-protection committees in almost all participating pesantren. Many educators expressed uncertainty about what steps to take when witnessing or hearing reports of violence. Some pesantren rely solely on informal verbal communication, which often results in inconsistent handling, loss of information, or unresolved cases.

Documentation systems were minimal or nonexistent. Teachers expressed concerns about administrative burden, lack of training, and fear that documentation could invite external scrutiny that may harm the pesantren's reputation.

This finding is consistent with Wulczyn et al.'s argument that child-protection systems fail in the absence of clear governance structures and functional reporting mechanisms.²⁶ Structural gaps expose children to repeated risks, as incidents may go unreported or mishandled.

The reliance on informal processes reflects typical patterns in community-based religious institutions, where trust-based relationships often replace formal administrative systems.²⁷ Yet, this increases vulnerability, especially in boarding environments where students live full-time.

²⁴ Michael Fullan, *The New Meaning of Educational Change* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2015); Muhammad Anas Ma'arif & Muhamad Arif, "Sustaining Character Education in Pesantren: A Holistic and Culturally Embedded Learning Ecosystem," *Jurnal Cakrawala Pendidikan* 45, no. 2 (June 2016): 402-418. <https://doi.org/10.21831/cp.v45i2.94968>

²⁵ Izzat Amini et al., "The Role of Pesantren in Implementing the Educational Triumvirate Through Transformative Heritage in Society 5.0," *Maharot: Journal of Islamic Education* 9, no. 2 (December 2025): 198-210. <https://doi.org/10.28944/maharot.v9i2.2316>

²⁶ Fred Wulczyn et al., *Adapting a Systems Approach to Child Protection: Key Concepts and Considerations* (Chicago: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, 2009).

²⁷ Gary L. Bowen, D. K. Orthner, J.A. Martin, & Jay A. Mancini, "Building community capacity: A manual for U. S. Family Support Centers," in Jay A. Mancini and Gary L. Bowen, *Community Capacity Building* (Georgia-USA: The University of Georgia, 2014)

Organizational management literature emphasizes that effective child protection requires predictable procedures, clearly assigned responsibilities, systematic monitoring, and comprehensive documentation.²⁸ Consistent with recent institutional safeguarding research, effective child-protection systems depend on formal governance arrangements, accountability mechanisms, standardized reporting procedures, and continuous monitoring to ensure organizational compliance and children's safety.²⁹ The findings, therefore, highlight an urgent need for governance reforms that strengthen institutional capacity and embed safeguarding into routine organizational management.

Human-Resource Limitations: Lack of Experts and Training Opportunities

Participants in both regions consistently reported a shortage of internal professionals—psychologists, counselors, social workers, or trained child-protection officers. Teachers often serve multiple roles: educator, caregiver, supervisor, and administrator. Many expressed feeling overwhelmed, undertrained, and unprepared to address psychological or behavioral issues among students.³⁰ Bringing external experts to pesantren is also difficult due to administrative complexity, geographical isolation, and limited funding. Many pesantren expressed an interest in long-term collaboration but lacked resources to sustain such initiatives.

This finding corresponds with the broader literature on Indonesian education, which highlights persistent disparities in human-resource capacity between urban and rural educational institutions. Many rural schools and *pesantren* continue to face limited access to professional training, institutional resources, and technical support, reducing their ability to implement educational reforms effectively.³¹ Capacity-building theory emphasizes that sustainable institutional change depends not only on knowledge acquisition but also on the development of practical skills, leadership capacity, organizational systems, and continuous mentoring. Effective child protection

²⁸ Mariëlle R. Bruning & Jaap E. Doek, "Characteristics of an Effective Child Protection System in the European and International Contexts." *International Journal on Child Maltreatment: Research, Policy and Practice* 4, no. 1 (August 2021): 231–256. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42448-021-00079-5>. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s42448-021-00079-5>

²⁹ Sarah Rogula, Jamina Bittner, Anna Eberhardt, Jörg M. Fegert, Ulrike Hoffmann & Marion Jarczok. (2026). "A Patchwork of Child Protection – Mapping the Gaps in Institutional Safeguarding Measures: A Scoping Review." *International Journal on Child Maltreatment: Research, Policy and Practice* 9 (February 2026): 349–366. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42448-026-00252-8>

³⁰ Afrooz Kaviani Johnson, *From Concept to Application: A Critical Reflection on Child Safeguarding from A Children's Rights Perspective* (Amsterdam: Ipskamp Printing–Meijers-reeks, 2025). Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4212005>

³¹ Asian Development Bank (ADB), *Education in Indonesia: Rising to the Challenge* (Paris: The OECD Publishing, 2015). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264230750-en>; Pipit Novita, "The Quest for Teacher Education Quality in Indonesia: The Long and Winding Road," Chapter 32 in M. S. Khine and Y. Liu (eds.), *Handbook of Research on Teacher Education* (Singapore, 2022): 651–673. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-9785-2_32

therefore requires competent personnel, clear institutional procedures, and ongoing professional support. Policies alone cannot guarantee meaningful implementation if staff members lack the necessary competencies and organizational backing.³² Without sustained investment in human-resource development and institutional capacity, safeguarding initiatives are unlikely to be implemented consistently or achieve lasting improvements in children's safety and well-being.

Furthermore, in boarding schools, the role of educators extends beyond formal instruction into pastoral care, making training in child psychology essential. The difficulty in securing external expertise reinforces the importance of developing internal talent through sustained training programs and partnerships.

Positive Momentum: High Motivation for Change and Institutional Self-Reflection

Despite challenges, the FGDs revealed strong motivation to improve. Participants frequently expressed a desire to create safer environments, reduce harsh practices, and modernize institutional governance. Many educators shared stories of past incidents that made them reconsider traditional disciplinary methods. Self-reflection was particularly strong among younger *ustadz-ustadzah*, who showed openness to psychological insights, non-violent discipline strategies, and structured reporting mechanisms.

In Kediri and Blitar, several pesantren requested follow-up programs, including training-of-trainers, guidance in drafting SOP, and development of educational modules on child protection.

This momentum mirrors findings from educational change research showing that sustainable reform is more likely to occur when it is driven by internal motivation, collaborative learning, and collective reflection rather than external compliance.³³ Likewise, the program's participatory approach—through dialogue, storytelling, and case-based reflection—proved effective in fostering awareness, strengthening collective ownership, and encouraging institutional commitment, consistent with studies emphasizing participatory learning as a foundation for sustainable educational transformation.³⁴

Bandura's social learning theory helps explain this process: educators change behavior when they observe respected peers modeling new practices,

³² Christopher Potter & Richard Brough, "Systemic Capacity Building: A Hierarchy of Needs." *Health Policy and Planning* 19, no. 5 (2004): 336–345. DOI: 10.1093/heapol/czh038

³³ Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (Doubleday, 2006); Adrianna Kezar, "How Colleges Change: Understanding, Leading, and Enacting Change." *Review of Higher Education* 42, No. 2 (2018): 499–529. DOI: 10.4324/9781315121178

³⁴ Arjen E. J. Wals & Aaron Benavot, "Can We Meet the Sustainability Challenges? The Role of Education and Lifelong Learning." *European Journal of Education* 52, no. 4 (2017): 404–413. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12250>

internalize expected outcomes, and receive social reinforcement.³⁵ FGDs enabled this mechanism by showcasing positive examples and encouraging teachers to re-evaluate norms.

Key Cross-Regional Differences

Comparison between Malang and Kediri–Blitar revealed: *First*, **Malang** had greater diversity of pesantren types and more urban–rural variation. Awareness levels varied widely between institutions. *Second*, **Kediri–Blitar** participants demonstrated stronger administrative readiness and more active leadership engagement, partly due to established networks between pesantren and local Ministry of Religious Affairs officers. *Third*, rural pesantren showed higher cultural resistance but greater enthusiasm for theological framing and community-based dialogue.³⁶

These differences reflect how institutional culture, socio-economic context, and regional networks shape the readiness for child-protection reforms. The stronger bureaucratic relationship in Kediri–Blitar aligns with literature emphasizing the role of institutional partnerships in educational change. Meanwhile, the diversity in Malang corresponds with broader demographic complexity, which affects levels of organizational capacity.

Integration of Islamic Ethics as a Catalyst for Acceptance

Across all regions, the most influential driver of acceptance was the integration of Islamic ethics into child-protection discourse. When child protection was linked to *akhlak* (moral character), *tarbiyah bi al-rifq* (gentle education), *amanah* of educators, maqasid al-shariah (objectives of Islamic law), participants reported feeling “morally obligated” to adopt safer practices.³⁷

This confirms studies showing that culturally and religiously grounded narratives are essential for influencing behavior in religious communities.³⁸ The use of Islamic concepts aligns the program with pesantren identity, making child protection a continuation—not a disruption—of tradition.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSION

The community service program conducted in the pesantren of Malang, Kediri, and Blitar demonstrates that mitigating violence against children requires a multidimensional approach that acknowledges cultural, structural,

³⁵ Albert Bandura. *Social learning theory* (Michigan: Prentice-Hall, 1977).

³⁶ Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia (Kemenag RI). *Pedoman Pengelolaan Pesantren* (Jakarta: Kemenag RI, 2021).

³⁷ Achmad Muzammil Alfian Nasrullah et al., “Child Protection in Indonesian Islamic Boarding Schools: Between Compliance and Normative Coherence. A Systematic Literature Review,” *FIKROTUNA; Jurnal Pendidikan dan Manajemen Islam* 15, No. 01 (March 2026): 231-253

³⁸ J. Mark Halstead, “Islamic Values: A Distinctive Framework for Moral Education?” *Journal of Moral Education* 36, NO. 3 (2007): 283-296. DOI: 10.1080/03057240701643056

and human-resource realities. The findings show that awareness of child-protection principles is still limited among teachers and caregivers, partly because disciplinary norms are culturally embedded and historically justified. This aligns with global evidence that violence in educational settings often persists due to normalization and lack of knowledge about its psychological impact.

Furthermore, pesantren's hierarchical structure places the *kiai* at the center of decision-making and cultural authority. Institutional acceptance of child-protection initiatives is highly dependent on leadership endorsement, confirming studies on the central role of moral authority in religious educational institutions. Structural limitations—such as the absence of Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), reporting mechanisms, and documentation systems—remain significant barriers that expose students to vulnerability. As literature emphasizes, child protection cannot function effectively without clear governance systems.

Human-resource constraints also exacerbate the problem. Most pesantren lack trained counselors or protection officers, making educators feel unprepared to address student psychological needs. This situation reflects broader patterns of uneven professional capacity in Indonesian education.

Despite these challenges, the program identified strong intrinsic motivation for change. When child protection is framed through Islamic ethical concepts—such as *rahmah*, *amanah*, and *hifẓ al-nafs*—participants show willingness to adopt safer practices. This supports community-based theories stating that culturally grounded interventions gain higher acceptance and sustainability. Overall, the initiative highlights the importance of integrating religious ethics, capacity building, and institutional strengthening in promoting safer pesantren environments.

Recommendations

Based on these conclusions, several recommendations are proposed: First, **Develop Clear and simple SOPs for Child Protection.** Pesantren should establish SOP, reporting pathways, and documentation systems to ensure consistent and accountable responses to incidents.

Second, **Strengthen Human-Resource Capacity.** Regular training on nonviolent discipline, child psychology, and legal frameworks should be provided for teachers, caregivers, and student mentors.

Third, **Integrate Islamic Ethical Narratives.** Child-protection messages should be framed within Islamic teachings to enhance cultural acceptance and reinforce moral responsibility.

Fourth, **Encourage Leadership-Driven Reform.** Active involvement of *kiai* and pesantren leaders is essential to legitimize and institutionalize change.

Fifth, **Foster Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration.** Long-term cooperation

between pesantren, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, child-protection agencies, and professionals will ensure sustainability.

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