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## Mental Health in Islamic Boarding Schools from an Islamic Psychology Perspective: A Literature Review

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### Key Words:

Islamic Boarding School, Mental Health, Islamic Psychology, Tazkiyatun Nafs, Santri Well-being.

**Abstract:** The highly regulated and communal environment of Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) presents unique psychological stressors for students (santri), often leading to adjustment disorders, anxiety, and academic burnout. However, conventional Western psychological interventions frequently overlook the spiritual dimension which is central to the pesantren lifestyle, resulting in suboptimal outcomes. This study aims to reconstruct a mental health framework within pesantren using an Islamic Psychology perspective through a systematic literature review. Employing a qualitative library research design, data were harvested from authoritative Islamic texts (turath) and contemporary academic journals published between 2020 and 2025. The data were analyzed using interpretive content analysis to synthesize indigenous therapeutic concepts. The findings reveal that Islamic Psychology reinterprets psychological distress not merely as pathology, but as a spiritual struggle (mujahadah) rooted in the condition of the soul (Nafs). Key therapeutic mechanisms identified include Tazkiyatun Nafs (soul purification) as a core healing process, Dhikr (remembrance of God) for emotional regulation, and the paternal role of the Kyai in providing existential security. The study concludes that the pesantren functions as a natural "therapeutic community" where mental resilience is achieved by integrating spiritual discipline with communal social support. This research contributes a holistic model of well-being that harmonizes clinical needs with religious values, offering a culturally congruent approach to mental health in Islamic education.

### Introduction

Pesantren, as an indigenous Indonesian educational institution, possesses unique characteristics that combine an academic curriculum with intensive, twenty-four-hour character development (Hidayat & Prasetya, 2023). Although this boarding system aims to produce a knowledgeable and moral generation, the highly structured, dense, and communal lifestyle often serves as a distinct stressor that significantly impacts the students' psychological well-being (Utami & Santoso, 2024). Mental health issues within Islamic educational environments

have become a global concern, paralleling the increasing reports of anxiety disorders, depression, and adjustment problems among boarding students (Rahman & Aziz, 2022). This phenomenon is exacerbated by social stigma in religious environments, which often perceive mental disorders as indicators of weak faith or a lack of worship (Sari & Nugroho, 2023). Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of the psychological dynamics within the pesantren environment is an urgent necessity to ensure the educational process runs optimally (Fauzi & Amal, 2021).

Several previous studies have examined psychological issues in pesantren, yet the majority of these studies tend to analyze the phenomenon using the lens of secular Western clinical psychology (Lestari & Putri, 2025). For instance, a study conducted by Wardani and Salim (2022) successfully mapped students' academic stress levels, but the solutions offered remained limited to conventional counseling that barely touched upon the students' spiritual dimension. Meanwhile, research by Kurniawan (2024) highlighted the importance of peer social support but has not yet explored how theocentric concepts such as *tawakkul* (reliance on God) and *sabr* (patience) function as coping mechanisms. Based on this literature review, a significant research gap was identified, wherein literature synthesizing the concept of mental health (*hifz al-nafs*) with specific Islamic psychotherapy interventions in pesantren remains very limited and unintegrated (Anwar & Mubarak, 2024). In fact, approaches that disregard local values and pesantren spirituality often render psychological interventions ineffective and difficult for the santri community to accept (Adnan, 2023).

This research holds high urgency considering that pesantren play a vital role in producing future leaders, making the mental health of santri a strategic asset of the ummah that must be safeguarded (Pratama, 2023). The novelty of this research lies in the effort to reconstruct a mental health model based on Islamic Indigenous Psychology, derived from classical and contemporary literature, to address the challenges of modernity within the pesantren environment (Hidayatullah, 2025). The primary objective of this study is to analyze the determinant factors of mental health in pesantren and formulate preventive and curative strategies through an Islamic psychology perspective based on library research (Zahra & Ali, 2023). Theoretically, this research is expected to enrich the body of knowledge in Islamic educational psychology by offering an integrative conceptual framework (Gunawan, 2021). Practically, the results of this study are beneficial as a guide for caregivers and teachers (*ustaz*) in creating a pesantren ecosystem that supports psychological well-being based on Islamic values (Wijaya & Kusuma, 2022).

## **Research Methods**

This research employs a qualitative approach with a library research design to explore mental health concepts within the pesantren environment through text-based interpretation (Assingkily, 2021). The library research method was explicitly chosen because this study focuses on reconstructing and synthesizing theoretical concepts from various authoritative literatures rather than gathering empirical data directly from the field (Darmalaksana, 2020). Data sources were categorized into primary sources, which include foundational Islamic psychology texts and classical turath books, and secondary sources comprising reputable scientific journals and research reports published within the last five years (Sari & Asmendri, 2020). Data collection was systematically conducted using heuristic documentation techniques by searching digital databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, and DOAJ using specific keywords like "Islamic Psychotherapy," "Santri Well-being," and "Indigenous Psychology" (Hardani et al., 2020). The collected literature subsequently underwent a rigorous selection process based on academic credibility and thematic relevance to ensure the validity of the information used in the theoretical construction (Hamzah, 2022). Data analysis was performed using qualitative content analysis techniques, which involved distinct stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing to interpret the latent meanings behind the texts deeply (Fadli, 2021). Furthermore, this study utilized a comparative analysis approach to bridge Western clinical psychological symptoms with Islamic spiritual diagnoses, aiming to formulate an integrative and applicable mental health model (Rijali, 2021).

## **Research Results**

The comprehensive synthesis of the reviewed literature reveals that mental health within the Islamic boarding school (pesantren) ecosystem is a multidimensional phenomenon that cannot be adequately understood through a singular clinical lens, but rather requires an integrated approach combining psychological resilience theories with spiritual maturity concepts. The analysis indicates that the etiology of psychological distress among students (santri) is primarily rooted in the radical transition from a family-centric environment to a highly regulated communal lifestyle, a condition often termed "adjustment disorder" in modern psychology but reinterpreted as mujahadah (spiritual struggle) in the pesantren tradition. The findings highlight that while academic pressure and sleep deprivation are significant stressors, the spiritual interpretation of these hardships determines the psychological outcome; students who view these challenges as riyadhah (spiritual training) demonstrate higher resilience compared to those who view them merely as institutional restrictions. This suggests that the

cognitive framing of stress in pesantren is intrinsically linked to the theological understanding of bala (trials) and sabar (patience).

From a diagnostic perspective, the literature consistently points to a fundamental divergence between Western psychiatric models and Islamic psychology in viewing mental health symptoms. The findings demonstrate that in the context of pesantren, symptoms of anxiety and depression are frequently associated with the condition of the Qalb (heart) and Nafs (soul). The analysis uncovers that spiritual instability, often described as Ghafalah (heedlessness) or lack of connection with the Divine, is a major predictor of psychological vulnerability among students. Unlike secular approaches that might isolate the individual for clinical treatment, the Islamic perspective embedded in the literature advocates for a diagnosis that includes metaphysical assessments, viewing emotional turbulence as a signal of spiritual disconnect rather than solely a neurochemical imbalance. Consequently, the findings suggest that "healing" in this context is synonymous with Tazkiyatun Nafs (purification of the soul), where the restoration of mental health is contingent upon the restoration of the spiritual bond.

Furthermore, the review identifies a robust inventory of indigenous therapeutic interventions that are unique to the pesantren environment. The analysis confirms that religious practices such as Tahajjud (night prayer), Dhikr (remembrance of God), and Quranic recitation function as potent psychotherapeutic tools. These practices are shown to operate on a cognitive-behavioral level by restructuring the students' focus from worldly anxieties to transcendental reliance (Tawakkul). The literature reveals that Dhikr, in particular, induces a state of relaxation and emotional regulation that rivals conventional meditation techniques. Moreover, the findings emphasize the role of the pesantren as a "therapeutic community," where the communal bond (Ukhuwah) and the mentorship of the Kyai (spiritual leader) provide a layered social support system. The figure of the Kyai is found to be central to mental health management, acting not just as an administrator but as a spiritual counselor whose guidance provides existential security to the students. Thus, the findings conclude that effective mental health maintenance in Islamic boarding schools is achieved not through the separation of religion and psychology, but through their seamless integration into daily living practices.

## **Discussion**

The theoretical analysis indicates that mental health in Islamic boarding schools must be fundamentally viewed through the lens of Fitrah, where psychological stability is inextricably linked to the purity of the soul and one's connection with the Creator (Iskandar, 2022). Unlike

secular psychology, which often isolates symptoms as biological or environmental pathologies, the Islamic perspective interprets student anxiety as a manifestation of a spiritual void that requires a reconstructive approach through Tazkiyatun Nafs or soul purification (Maulana & Hidayat, 2023). This finding confirms that the concept of healing in the pesantren ecosystem goes beyond mere clinical recovery to include the attainment of Nafs Mutmainnah (tranquil soul), which serves as the ultimate indicator of mental well-being (Safitri & Dewi, 2022). Furthermore, the role of the Kyai acts as a central therapeutic figure who provides not only religious instruction but also essential existential validation for students facing complex adaptation crises (Basri & Asyari, 2024). The communal nature of the pesantren environment functions as a natural support system, where the implementation of Ukhuwah Islamiyah (Islamic brotherhood) significantly mitigates the feelings of loneliness and isolation commonly prevalent in boarding education settings (Nugraha, 2021). While traditional spiritual practices provide robust coping mechanisms, current literature suggests an urgent need to formalize these approaches by integrating them with professional counseling techniques to effectively handle severe pathological cases that cannot be resolved by spiritual advice alone (Yusuf & Santoso, 2025). Ultimately, the systematic integration of patience (Sabr) and gratitude (Shukur) into the daily hidden curriculum serves as a preventative cognitive strategy that builds long-term psychological resilience against high-pressure academic stressors (Rahmawati, 2023).

## Conclusion

This study concludes that mental health within the Islamic boarding school (pesantren) ecosystem is fundamentally rooted in the integration of theological conviction and psychological resilience, diverging significantly from secular clinical models. The synthesis of literature reveals that the stability of a student's mental state is inextricably linked to their spiritual condition, where practices of Tazkiyatun Nafs (soul purification) serve as the primary mechanism for mitigating anxiety and depression. Furthermore, the findings confirm that the pesantren functions as a unique therapeutic community, where the authoritative guidance of the Kyai and the strong social capital of Ukhuwah Islamiyah provide a distinct protective factor against the psychological stressors associated with the rigorous boarding environment. Thus, mental health in this context is not merely the absence of pathology, but the presence of spiritual tranquility (Sakinah) achieved through consistent religious discipline.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the advancement of Islamic Educational Psychology by constructing a holistic mental health framework that bridges the gap between modern clinical diagnosis and traditional spiritual healing. The significant value of this study

lies in its re-conceptualization of "adjustment disorders" as spiritual struggles (mujahadah), thereby offering a more culturally congruent approach to student well-being that validates their religious worldview. Methodologically, this study demonstrates the efficacy of the systematic literature review in synthesizing fragmented classical and contemporary narratives into a cohesive operational model, proving that indigenous Islamic wisdom possesses high applicability in addressing modern psychological challenges without discarding the scientific rigors of psychology.

However, this research is limited by its reliance on textual analysis and secondary data, which restricts the ability to verify the practical efficacy of these concepts in real-time clinical scenarios. The findings remain largely normative and theoretical without empirical quantification of specific psychological outcomes among students. Therefore, future research is strongly recommended to employ empirical methods, such as longitudinal case studies or mixed-method designs, to test the correlation between specific spiritual interventions—such as Dhikr intensity—and anxiety reduction among students. Additionally, further studies should aim to develop a standardized "Islamic Resilience Scale" specifically for boarding school students to provide concrete, measurable data for the development of evidence-based mental health policies in Islamic educational institutions.

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