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BEYOND SPIRITUAL SUPPORT: EXPLORING THE DUAL ROLE OF ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS IN STUDENTS' MENTAL HEALTH

Melampaui Dukungan Spiritual: Menjelajahi Peran Ganda Lingkungan Sekolah Berasrama Islam dalam Kesehatan Mental Siswa

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Abstract

Meningkatnya gangguan kesehatan mental remaja menuntut sekolah memperhatikan kesejahteraan psikologis di samping prestasi akademik. Sekolah berasrama Islam memiliki karakteristik unik yang memadukan pendidikan agama, ibadah, dan pembentukan karakter, tetapi mekanisme pengaruhnya terhadap kesehatan mental belum banyak dipahami. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi pengalaman kesehatan mental siswa serta faktor pelindung dan risiko melalui studi fenomenologi hermeneutik pada 12 siswa usia 15–18 tahun di dua sekolah berasrama Islam di Malang. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dan dianalisis menggunakan IPA (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis). Temuan menunjukkan praktik keagamaan memperkuat regulasi emosi dan ketahanan. Sedangkan disiplin kaku, tuntutan ganda, keterbatasan otonomi, dan stigma meningkatkan kerentanan serta menghambat pencarian bantuan. Kebaruan penelitian terletak pada model Dukungan Sistemik Keagamaan Dinamis, yang menjelaskan mekanisme dualistik dan dinamis lingkungan religius sebagai sumber proteksi sekaligus risiko melalui keseimbangan dukungan spiritual, budaya institusional, relasi sosial, dan otonomi. Model ini mengimplikasikan perlunya konseling terintegrasi, pengurangan stigma, dan keseimbangan tuntutan akademik-keagamaan.

Rising adolescent mental health problems require schools to prioritize psychological well-being alongside academic achievement. Islamic boarding schools offer a distinctive religious-educational context, yet their dual influence on student mental health remains underexplored. This hermeneutic phenomenological study examined the lived experiences of 12 students aged 15–18 from two Islamic boarding schools in Malang, using semi-structured interviews and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Findings indicate that communal religious practices enhance emotional regulation and resilience, whereas rigid discipline, intensive dual demands, limited autonomy, and stigma increase psychological vulnerability and inhibit help-seeking. The study's key novelty is the Dynamic Religious Systemic Support Model, conceptualizing mental health as a dynamic, dualistic outcome of interactions among spiritual support, institutional culture, social relationships, and personal autonomy. The model underscores the need for integrated counseling, stigma reduction, and balanced academic-religious demands.

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A. INTRODUCTION

Mental health among adolescents and young adults has emerged as a major global public health concern. Recent reports have documented a substantial increase in the prevalence of psychological disorders, particularly anxiety and depression, over the past decade (World Health Organization, 2022). Rapid advances in digital technology, coupled with profound social transformations in the post-pandemic era, have introduced new challenges for young people in maintaining their psychological well-being. Within this context, educational institutions are no longer viewed solely as centers for academic learning but also as key agents responsible for fostering environments that promote students' mental health and well-being (OECD, 2023; UNESCO, 2025). Consequently, an increasing number of countries have integrated spiritual values and religious practices into formal education as a holistic approach to strengthening adolescents' psychological resilience (Koenig, 2018; Wong et al., 2021). Religious educational environments are widely regarded as providing moral guidance, existential meaning, and spiritual support that enable students to navigate the complexities and uncertainties of contemporary life (Koenig et al., 2020a; Village & Francis, 2021).

Despite these potential benefits, the impact of religious educational environments on students' mental health remains inconclusive. On the one hand, Islamic educational institutions, including *pesantren* and integrated Islamic schools, cultivate supportive social communities, reinforce religious values, and facilitate faith-based coping strategies that may promote psychological well-being (Bamford et al., 2023; Sufya et al., 2026). On the other hand, rigid disciplinary structures, intensive academic and religious demands, and pervasive social control may contribute to emotional exhaustion, academic anxiety, and the stigmatization of mental health difficulties, which may be interpreted as manifestations of weak faith or inadequate religiosity (Babys & Suryanto, 2026; Rassool, 2021).

This tension is particularly salient in modern *pesantren* in Malang, where students navigate intensive academic and religious schedules, constrained personal time, regulated digital access, and continuous demands for communal and social adaptation. Such conditions reveal a fundamental paradox: the same religious practices and institutional communities intended to foster spiritual development and resilience may, under certain circumstances, become sources of psychological strain and vulnerability. Addressing this paradox requires a contextual examination of how students experience, interpret, and negotiate these competing influences, thereby informing mental health support that is both psychologically responsive and consistent with the spiritual and educational missions of *pesantren*.

This study is grounded in two complementary theoretical perspectives. The first is Religious Coping Theory by (K. I. . Pargament, 2001), which conceptualizes religion as a source of coping strategies that enable individuals to deal with life stressors through both positive and negative forms of religious coping (K. Pargament et al., 2011). Positive religious coping involves seeking meaning, surrendering to God, and strengthening one's spiritual connection, whereas negative religious coping occurs when adversity is interpreted as divine punishment or rejection.

The second theoretical framework is Ecological Systems Theory developed (Bronfenbrenner, 1981), which positions the educational environment as part of the individual's microsystem that directly influences human development. Daily interactions with teachers, caregivers, peers, institutional regulations, and school culture are understood as interconnected environmental factors that collectively shape students' psychological well-being within broader social systems (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007; Damon & Lerner, 2006; Eriksson et al., 2018).

Previous studies have consistently demonstrated a positive relationship between religiosity and psychological resilience, as well as individuals' capacity to cope with stressful life experiences (Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005; Hook et al., 2013; Weber & Pargament, 2014). Within Muslim communities, spirituality-based interventions have also been shown to reduce depressive symptoms and improve psychological well-being (Nawaz & Yousuf, 2025; Rassool, 2024). Nevertheless, most existing research has focused primarily on individual religiosity or the effectiveness of Islamic-based psychological therapies

(Haque & Rothman, 2021; Terblanche & Abrahams, 2024; York Al-Karam, 2018).

Studies examining Islamic educational environments as social contexts influencing students' mental health remain limited and are predominantly quantitative and correlational in nature, emphasizing statistical relationships between variables while offering limited insight into the underlying psychosocial processes (G. C. Patton et al., 2016; Shodiq et al., 2025). Furthermore, the existing literature tends to portray Islamic educational environments from a dichotomous perspective, either emphasizing their spiritual benefits or criticizing the psychological consequences of highly regulated institutional practices (Intan Nur Fauziah Saputri et al., 2026; Saputra et al., 2025).

These limitations highlight several important research gaps. First, there remains a lack of in-depth qualitative studies investigating how various elements of Islamic educational ecosystems including communal worship routines, restrictions on digital technology use, boarding school culture, and teacher student relationships simultaneously function as protective and risk factors for students' mental health. Second, students' subjective experiences in interpreting psychological distress within religious educational settings have received limited scholarly attention. Consequently, the mechanisms through which Islamic educational environments shape students' mental health are still insufficiently understood.

To address these gaps, the present study adopts a phenomenological approach to explore students' lived experiences within Islamic educational environments. Unlike previous studies that have generally conceptualized the influence of religious education in linear terms, this study approaches students' experiences as dynamic, multifaceted, and inherently ambivalent. Accordingly, this research proposes the conceptual model of Dynamic Religious Systemic Support, which posits that Islamic educational environments simultaneously function as sources of spiritual support and psychological vulnerability, depending on how students interpret their social interactions, institutional culture, and religious practices.

Based on this rationale, the study aims to explore students' lived experiences of mental health within Islamic educational environments, identify institutional factors that operate as both protective and risk factors, and formulate contextually relevant recommendations for Islamic educational institutions to strengthen mental health support systems while preserving the spiritual values and educational objectives of Islamic education.

B. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological design to explore students' lived experiences of mental health within Islamic educational environments (Creswell & Poth, 2025; Smith et al., 2008). The study was conducted in two modern *pesantren* in Malang, Indonesia, which integrate intensive Islamic education with the national curriculum (Miles et al., 2014). Twelve students aged 15–18

years were selected through purposive sampling based on the principle of recruiting information-rich participants (Palinkas et al., 2015; M. Quinn. Patton, 2015). The inclusion criteria were: having resided in the boarding school for at least one year, being able to articulate and reflect on psychological experiences, and voluntarily consenting to participate. The one-year residence criterion was established to ensure sufficient exposure to the academic, religious, social, and institutional routines of the *pesantren*.

Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews supported by an interview guide, audio recordings, and field notes. The interviews explored students' psychological experiences, religious practices, academic and religious demands, social relationships, disciplinary practices, technology restrictions, autonomy, and help-seeking experiences.

The data were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith & Nizza, 2022) through six stages: (1) familiarization, involving repeated reading and listening to the transcripts to develop an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences; (2) initial noting, identifying significant statements, experiences, emotions, and meanings expressed by participants; (3) development of emergent themes, formulating psychologically meaningful concepts from the initial notes; (4) idiographic analysis, organizing and examining themes in depth within each individual case before comparison; (5) cross-case analysis, identifying patterns, convergences, and divergences across participants; and (6) interpretive synthesis, integrating higher-order themes and interpreting them within the context of Islamic education. The final stage connected the findings with religious coping theory (K. I. Pargament, 2001; K. Pargament et al., 2011) and ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1981; (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007), informing the development of the Dynamic Religious Systemic Support Model.

The trustworthiness of the findings was strengthened through member checking and source triangulation to establish credibility, thick contextual description to support transferability, an audit trail to ensure dependability, and researcher reflexivity to enhance confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1990; (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Ethical procedures included voluntary participation, the use of pseudonyms, data confidentiality, and access to counseling support when the interviews caused emotional distress (Israel & Hay, 2006; Liamputtong, 2020).

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings derived from Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) of students' lived experiences of mental health within *pesantren* environments. The analysis generated three interrelated themes that illustrate the complex ways in which Islamic educational settings shape students' mental health experiences. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that religious educational environments do not exert a linear influence on mental health; rather, they simultaneously function as protective contexts while also creating conditions that may contribute to psychological distress.

1. Spiritual Anchor as a Protective Factor for Mental Health

The first theme reveals that religious practices embedded in students' daily routines function not merely as expressions of ritual devotion but also as a spiritual anchor that helps students manage psychological pressures within academic and *pesantren* environments. Existing research suggests that religiosity and spirituality can provide adolescents with meaning, emotional resources, and coping mechanisms when confronting stressful experiences, although their effects may vary according to the form and context of religious engagement (Hardy et al., 2019; Mannion et al., 2026).

Congregational prayer, *dhikr* (remembrance of God), supplication, and the internalization of *tawakkul* (trust in God's will) were consistently perceived by participants as sources of emotional comfort, security, and hope when confronting academic pressures and the demands of boarding-school life. This finding is consistent with recent evidence indicating that religious and spiritual practices may contribute to psychological well-being and the management of anxiety and stress among young people (Mannion et al., 2026; Upenieks, 2023).

One participant (S1, 16 years old) explained: *"When the exam schedule becomes very intense and I feel extremely anxious, performing Tahajjud prayer together and engaging in dhikr at the mosque makes me feel relieved. I feel at peace because I believe that everything is under Allah's control."*

This statement indicates that, within the participants' experiences, religious practices serve a psychological function that extends beyond the fulfillment of ritual obligations. Rather, religious activities become mechanisms through which students achieve emotional grounding, particularly by restoring a sense of emotional stability when confronted with anxiety, uncertainty, and pressures that cannot be fully controlled individually. The relationship between religious engagement and emotional regulation has also been documented in adolescent research, suggesting that religiousness may be associated with self-regulatory processes, including emotion regulation (Holmes et al., 2019)

Furthermore, this experience demonstrates that *tawakkul* plays an important role in the cognitive reinterpretation of stressful experiences. When students perceive ultimate outcomes as resting within God's will, academic pressure may be interpreted not solely as a threat to the self but as a situation that can be addressed through effort, prayer, and acceptance of outcomes beyond personal control. This interpretation is consistent with Religious Coping Theory, which conceptualizes religious beliefs and practices as resources through which individuals construct meaning and respond to stressful life circumstances (K. Pargament et al., 2011; K. I. . Pargament, 2001).

Recent research further indicates that religious coping may influence psychological adjustment through meaning-making and affective processes (Wnuk, 2024). Thus, religiosity may operate through cognitive and emotional processes that reshape how students perceive and respond to stressful experiences. Rather than necessarily eliminating anxiety, religious coping may place distress within a

broader framework of meaning that makes stressful experiences more manageable (Mannion et al., 2026). In this context, prayer and *dhikr* can be understood as reflective practices that redirect attention from uncertainty toward trust, while *tawakkul* provides an orientation toward accepting circumstances that remain beyond individual control. These processes are consistent with the distinction between adaptive and maladaptive forms of religious coping described in the religious coping literature (K. Pargament et al., 2011; Puchalska-Wasyl & Małaj, 2024).

Another important dimension lies in the communal nature of the religious practices experienced by participants. Congregational prayer, collective *dhikr*, and spiritual activities at the mosque create social spaces in which students do not have to confront psychological pressures entirely on their own. Research on adolescent religiosity suggests that religious involvement may provide opportunities for social connection, belonging, and interpersonal support, which can contribute to psychological well-being and resilience (Mannion et al., 2026). Thus, the regulatory function of religion in this study appears to operate through two interconnected pathways: the vertical relationship between students and God and the horizontal relationships between students and their religious community.

The presence of peers and members of the religious community during collective practices may strengthen students' sense of belonging, reduce social isolation, and provide emotional support during periods of psychological difficulty. Consequently, students' spiritual experiences cannot be separated from the social environment in which these practices occur (Ikromi et al., 2025; Koenig et al., 2020b; Layyinah et al., 2026; Saputra et al., 2025). Rather, the findings suggest that the Islamic boarding-school environment constitutes a socio-spiritual ecology in which religious practices and interpersonal relationships jointly provide psychological resources.

More importantly, these findings extend the understanding of the relationship between Islamic education, religiosity, and psychological well-being by demonstrating that religious practices may function as a mechanism of collective emotional regulation. This interpretation is consistent with research indicating that religious practices can support self-regulation and emotional processes during adolescence (Holmes et al., 2019).

Emotional regulation in the present study does not occur solely through students' individual capacity to pray or engage in *dhikr* when experiencing anxiety, but also through religious routines that are collectively practiced and continuously integrated into everyday school life. Such routines may provide structure and predictability, while creating opportunities for students to temporarily disengage from academic pressures and engage in spiritual reflection. Research on adolescent religiosity similarly suggests that religious practices and internalized religious commitments can shape psychological processes and behavioral self-regulation (Hardy et al., 2019). Accordingly, students' emotional resilience appears to

emerge from the interaction among religious beliefs, spiritual practices, structured routines, and communal support.

This finding suggests that Islamic education oriented toward psychological well-being should not be limited to the transmission of religious knowledge but should also cultivate meaningful and supportive religious experiences that enable students to develop adaptive strategies for coping with life stressors. Recent systematic evidence indicates that the relationship between religiosity and adolescent mental health is generally positive but context-dependent, highlighting the importance of how religious beliefs and practices are experienced and enacted by young people (Mannion et al., 2026). Within this framework, religiosity functions not merely as an object of learning but as a psychosocial resource that may contribute to the development of students' emotional resilience.

2. The Paradox of Disciplinary Regulation and Academic Burnout

Despite the protective functions provided by religious practices, participants also described psychological challenges arising from a highly structured institutional environment. Research on adolescent well-being indicates that intensive school demands, workload-related stress, and limited psychosocial resources are important factors associated with school burnout and psychological strain (Lacombe et al., 2026; Read et al., 2022).

The second theme indicates that strict disciplinary regulations, intensive academic workloads, and demanding religious obligations may cumulatively contribute to students' academic exhaustion and psychological distress. Recent longitudinal evidence further suggests that workload-related stress is a consistent correlate of school burnout, whereas teacher support may function as a protective factor (Lacombe et al., 2026).

This experience is reflected in the statement of Participant S5 (17 years old): *"Our daily schedule starts at four in the morning and ends at ten at night without any real break. Between memorizing the Qur'an and meeting mathematics targets, I often cry alone in the bathroom because of physical and mental exhaustion. The rigid boarding-school rules and lack of privacy make everything even more difficult."*

This narrative illustrates that the pressure experienced by students does not originate from a single source but rather from the accumulation of multiple demands that occur simultaneously and repeatedly. Such cumulative exposure to academic and institutional demands may reduce opportunities for psychological recovery and increase students' vulnerability to exhaustion (Lacombe et al., 2026; Schaefer et al., 2026). Thus, exhaustion in this context should not be understood merely as a temporary response to an excessive number of tasks but also as a consequence of an imbalance between environmental demands and students' capacity for recovery.

Furthermore, participants' narratives indicate that the central issue is not only the number of activities but also the limited personal space and autonomy available in everyday life. Adolescence is a developmentally sensitive period in which autonomy, self-regulation, social relationships, and opportunities to exercise personal agency are closely associated with psychological adjustment and well-being. Recent research on school burnout indicates that autonomy-supportive educational environments are associated with more adaptive psychological outcomes, whereas unsupportive school climates may contribute to more severe burnout profiles (Wang & Song, 2025).

When almost every aspect of daily life is regulated by institutional schedules and regulations, students may experience a discrepancy between external demands and their internal need for personal control. This interpretation is particularly relevant in boarding-school contexts, where students spend substantial amounts of time within the institutional environment and have fewer opportunities to disengage from school-related demands. Empirical studies have found that boarding-school experiences may be associated with poorer mental health outcomes among adolescents, although these effects are influenced by relational and contextual factors (Xing et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2025).

The participant's statement that they “often cry alone in the bathroom” is therefore particularly significant because it suggests that psychological distress may not always have sufficient space for expression within the institutional environment. In this narrative, the bathroom may be interpreted as a temporary private space through which the student attempts to obtain psychological distance from an environment characterized by limited privacy.

This interpretation is consistent with broader evidence that adolescents' mental health is shaped not only by workload but also by the quality of their social and institutional environments (Read et al., 2022; Wang & Song, 2025). Therefore, disciplinary practices intended to establish order and character development may have different psychological consequences when they are not accompanied by flexibility, interpersonal communication, emotional support, and opportunities for students to exercise age-appropriate autonomy. Research on school disciplinary styles similarly indicates that high structural demands without sufficient support may be associated with less favorable health outcomes among adolescents (Lau et al., 2018).

From the perspective of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, the boarding-school environment constitutes a microsystem that directly influences individual development (Bronfenbrenner, 1981). Within this microsystem, students interact intensively with teachers, caregivers, peers, school regulations, academic curricula, and religious practices as part of their everyday lives. Because these interactions are intensive and continuous, characteristics of the institutional environment may exert substantial influence on students' psychological experiences.

Contemporary research similarly demonstrates that school climate, teacher support, workload, and institutional demands are closely related to students' psychological adjustment and burnout (Lacombe et al., 2026; Wang & Song, 2025). When interactions within the microsystem are characterized by excessive control, high expectations, demanding schedules, and limited opportunities to meet adolescents' developmental needs, an environment initially intended to provide structure and support may become a source of psychological pressure.

This finding is particularly relevant to boarding-school settings, where the educational institution simultaneously functions as a learning environment, residential space, and social community. Studies of boarding education have reported associations between boarding experiences and adolescent mental health difficulties, although the mechanisms appear to involve multiple contextual and relational factors rather than boarding status alone (Xing et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2025). Thus, the findings reveal a double-edged nature of Islamic boarding-school education: the same institutional structure can provide order, discipline, religious identity, and a sense of security, while under certain conditions it may also generate psychological stress when institutional demands exceed students' capacity for adaptation and recovery. This perspective emphasizes that the effectiveness of Islamic education depends not only on the intensity of character formation and academic achievement but also on the institution's capacity to balance discipline with emotional support, autonomy, privacy, and students' developmental needs.

These findings reinforce previous research indicating that academic workload and school-related stress are important contributors to student burnout, while supportive educational relationships may buffer these effects (Lacombe et al., 2026; Read et al., 2022). The present study extends this literature by demonstrating that academic exhaustion within an Islamic boarding-school context should be understood as the result of interactions among multiple demands within the broader educational ecosystem rather than solely as a consequence of academic workload.

The combination of an intensive academic curriculum, demanding religious activities, extended daily schedules, strict institutional regulations, limited privacy, and restricted autonomy may create a cumulative psychological burden that gradually depletes students' emotional resources. This interpretation is consistent with recent evidence showing that students exposed to high academic demands and less supportive school environments are more vulnerable to burnout (Schaefer et al., 2026; Wang & Song, 2025).

These findings also indicate that discipline and religious character formation do not inherently produce psychological well-being; rather, their effects depend substantially on how institutional practices are organized and experienced by students in their everyday lives. Therefore, Islamic educational institutions should consider educational environments in which discipline is accompanied by adequate recovery time, psychosocial support, private space, open communication, and opportunities for students

to progressively develop autonomy. Such an approach would allow institutional structures to retain their functions of character and spiritual development while simultaneously accommodating adolescents' psychological and developmental needs.

3. Mental Health Stigma and Barriers to Help-Seeking

The third theme concerns participants' experiences of seeking help when experiencing psychological distress. Previous research indicates that adolescents' help-seeking behavior can be influenced by perceived stigma, fear of negative social judgment, limited mental health literacy, and concerns about how psychological difficulties may be interpreted by others (Crockett et al., 2025; Ma et al., 2023; McPhail et al., 2024). In the present study, some participants encountered barriers to disclosing their emotional difficulties because they were concerned about negative judgment, social labeling, or the perception that psychological problems reflected weak faith.

This experience is clearly illustrated in the narrative of Participant S9 (15 years old): *"When I told one of the caregivers that I felt depressed and wanted to give up, I was only advised to recite istighfar more often and was told that I was not grateful enough. Since then, I have chosen to remain silent."* This statement indicates that seeking help did not always result in access to the psychological support participants perceived they needed. Research on adolescent help-seeking similarly shows that the responses received from significant others and the perceived safety of the social environment can shape subsequent decisions to continue seeking help or to withdraw from help-seeking processes (McPhail et al., 2024; Setia Lesmana & Chung, 2024).

At the empirical level, these findings suggest that some participants may suppress or conceal their psychological struggles when disclosure is perceived as potentially exposing them to negative judgments concerning their social or religious identity. The relationship between stigma, self-stigma, and help-seeking has also been documented in research showing that stigma from significant others can contribute to self-stigma, which is subsequently associated with less favorable attitudes toward psychological help-seeking (Locke & Kim, 2024).

Interpretively, this experience can be understood as a process of spiritualization of psychological distress, in which psychological difficulties are interpreted predominantly through a spiritual framework while their psychological and social dimensions receive insufficient attention. Qualitative research in religious communities has similarly identified tensions between spiritual explanations of distress and the need to recognize psychological and social dimensions of mental suffering, particularly when distress is reduced to a problem of religious deficiency (Lloyd & Hutchinson, 2025).

In this context, encouraging a student to recite *istighfar* more frequently may constitute meaningful spiritual support when it is provided as one component of a comprehensive response to

distress. However, when such advice is accompanied by the statement that the participant was "not grateful enough," religious practice may be experienced not only as spiritual support but also as a basis for moral evaluation of an individual experiencing psychological difficulties. Such responses may reinforce self-stigma when students begin to interpret their psychological difficulties as evidence that they are personally or religiously inadequate (Locke & Kim, 2024). Consequently, students may internalize the perception that acknowledging depression, anxiety, or emotional exhaustion is incompatible with being a religiously committed person.

Research on young people demonstrates that mental health stigma remains an important barrier to help-seeking and that reducing stigma can improve help-seeking attitudes and intentions (Crockett et al., 2025). Under such circumstances, remaining silent does not necessarily indicate an absence of psychological need; rather, it may represent an adaptive response to anticipated social consequences associated with disclosure, including stigma and fear of negative evaluation (McPhail et al., 2024).

This phenomenon can also be interpreted through the concept of negative religious coping, in which religious interpretations of difficult experiences may become associated with feelings of guilt, spiritual inadequacy, or perceptions of religious failure (K. Pargament et al., 2011; Puchalska-Wasyl & Małaj, 2024) . Importantly, the present finding should not be interpreted as suggesting that religious beliefs or spiritual practices are inherently harmful.

Research indicates that religious coping is multidimensional, and its relationship with psychological adjustment depends partly on how religious beliefs and practices are interpreted and applied in particular circumstances (Puchalska-Wasyl & Małaj, 2024). Moreover, research examining religious coping, stigma, and help-seeking suggests that religious coping can interact with stigma-related processes in shaping attitudes toward psychological counseling (Locke & Kim, 2024). Thus, the concern lies not in the presence of religious guidance itself but in the possibility that spiritual explanations become the sole framework for interpreting psychological suffering. When this occurs, students' psychological needs may remain unidentified or professional help-seeking may be delayed (Ma et al., 2023; McPhail et al., 2024).

A more integrated approach is therefore warranted in which spiritual guidance complements, rather than substitutes for, psychological assessment, counseling, and appropriate professional mental health services. Evidence from school-based mental health research supports the importance of combining mental health literacy, stigma reduction, and accessible support mechanisms to facilitate appropriate help-seeking among young people (Crockett et al., 2025; Ma et al., 2023).

An important contribution of this theme lies in demonstrating that institutional culture can shape students' help-seeking behavior by influencing their perceptions of safety, acceptance, confidentiality, and anticipated responses from others. A systematic review of school-based mental health services identified stigma, school-related factors, and access-related conditions as important components of adolescents'

help-seeking processes (McPhail et al., 2024). Similarly, research involving 760 Indonesian adolescents found that perceived stigma and mental health literacy mediated the relationship between school climate and help-seeking behavior, indicating that the broader educational environment is relevant to students' willingness to seek assistance (Setia Lesmana & Chung, 2024).

When educational environments are characterized by mental health stigma or by interpretations that associate psychological difficulties with spiritual weakness, students may become more reluctant to disclose their symptoms or seek professional assistance (Crockett et al., 2025; McPhail et al., 2024). Such delays are institutionally significant because they may reduce opportunities for early recognition and appropriate intervention (Ma et al., 2023). Therefore, strengthening spirituality within Islamic educational institutions should be accompanied by mental health literacy, appropriate competencies among caregivers and educators to recognize psychological distress, accessible referral mechanisms, and an institutional culture that minimizes stigma toward students seeking help.

Recent evidence indicates that interventions addressing mental health stigma among young people can improve stigma-related knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and help-seeking attitudes and intentions, although the sustainability of these effects requires further investigation (Crockett et al., 2025). A supportive Islamic educational environment therefore does not require eliminating the spiritual dimension of education; rather, it requires integrating spiritual, psychological, and social approaches so that students can understand that seeking professional psychological assistance is not necessarily incompatible with religious commitment. Such an integrated framework is consistent with emerging approaches to mental health support that recognize the importance of culturally responsive care while maintaining access to appropriate psychological and professional services (McPhail et al., 2024; Nazari et al., 2023).

4. Model Dynamic Religious Systemic Support

The Islamic educational ecosystem represents the primary context of this study and is characterized by the integration of formal academic curricula, intensive religious instruction, and a boarding school system. These interconnected characteristics shape students' everyday experiences and contribute to their psychological development.

Students' everyday experiences within the educational environment simultaneously generate two contrasting psychological pathways. The protective pathway represents Theme 1, in which spirituality functions as a stress-buffering mechanism through the perspective of Positive Religious Coping Theory. Communal worship, the internalization of *tawakkul* (trust in God's will), and supportive religious relationships may strengthen emotional regulation, psychological resilience, and well-being. Conversely, the risk pathway, represented by Themes 2 and 3, indicates that intensive academic and religious demands,

rigid institutional regulations, limited autonomy, and mental health stigma may contribute to academic burnout, psychological distress, and reduced help-seeking behavior. These processes can be understood through Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and the concept of Negative Religious Coping.

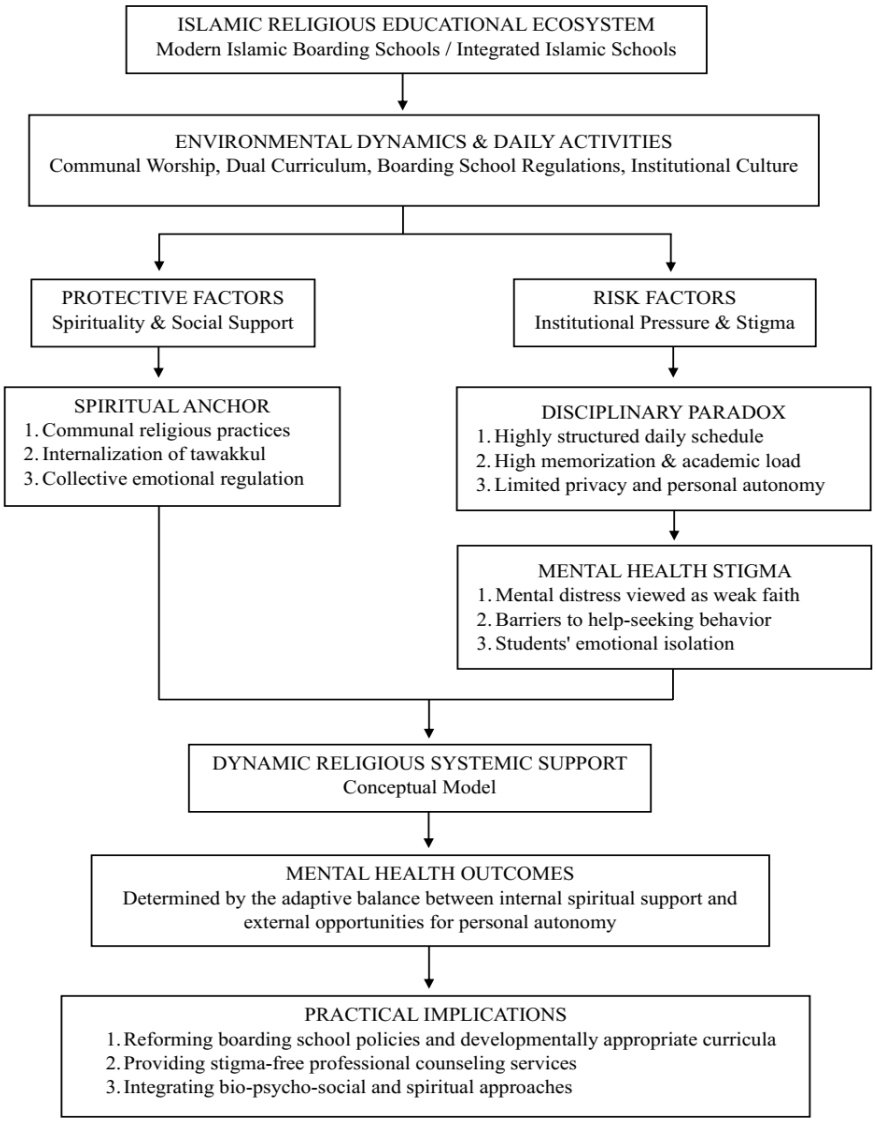


Figure 1. Model Dynamic Religious Systemic Support

The interaction between these two pathways forms the conceptual model of Dynamic Religious Systemic Support. Rather than viewing Islamic educational environments as inherently beneficial or detrimental to students' mental health, the model conceptualizes their influence as dynamic and contingent upon the interaction among spiritual support, institutional culture, disciplinary practices, social relationships, and opportunities for personal autonomy within the educational environment.

Students' mental health outcomes depend on the extent to which educational institutions maintain an adaptive balance between spiritual development and adolescents' psychological needs. Accordingly, the model emphasizes the importance of reforming boarding school policies, developing developmentally responsive curricula, integrating professional counseling services with spiritual guidance, strengthening mental health literacy among teachers and caregivers, reducing stigma surrounding psychological disorders, and adopting a holistic bio-psycho-social-spiritual approach to student well-being (Maduerawa et al., 2025; Sarwo Edy et al., 2024; Soviya & Safitri, 2025).

D. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Islamic religious educational environments exert a multidimensional influence on students' mental health. The findings of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) indicate that such environments can simultaneously function as protective contexts and potential sources of psychological vulnerability, depending on social interactions, institutional culture, and religious practices. Communal worship, Islamic values, and *tawakkul* served as spiritual anchors that supported adaptive religious coping and psychological resilience, whereas rigid regulations, intensive academic and religious demands, limited autonomy, and inadequate privacy contributed to academic burnout and psychological vulnerability. The findings further indicate that interpreting psychological distress solely through a spiritual lens may reinforce mental health stigma and discourage help-seeking. Accordingly, the study proposes the Dynamic Religious Systemic Support model, which emphasizes the importance of balancing spiritual support, social relationships, institutional culture, and students' personal autonomy in promoting mental health.

The findings suggest that Islamic educational institutions should adopt a more integrated and developmentally responsive approach to student mental health by balancing academic and religious demands, strengthening mental health literacy among teachers and boarding school caregivers, reducing stigma surrounding psychological difficulties, and integrating professional counseling services with appropriate spiritual guidance. Such an approach can enable Islamic educational environments to preserve their spiritual and character-building functions while simultaneously addressing students' psychological needs as an integral dimension of education.

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. The study involved only 12 students aged 15–18 years from two Islamic boarding schools in Malang, Indonesia, using purposive sampling within a qualitative phenomenological design. Therefore, the findings are context-specific and are not intended to be statistically generalized to all Islamic educational institutions or student populations. In addition, the study relied primarily on students' self-reported experiences, which may have been influenced by personal interpretation, social desirability, or

institutional context. Future research could involve larger and more diverse samples across different types of Islamic educational institutions and incorporate perspectives from teachers, caregivers, parents, and mental health professionals to further examine and refine the Dynamic Religious Systemic Support model.

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