

Hierarchical Culture in Islamic Boarding Schools Related to the Normalization of Bullying Behavior

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ABSTRACT

The hierarchical culture in Islamic boarding schools (pondok pesantren) is often seen as an integral part of the education system and the character-building process for students (santri). However, in some cases, this system can contribute to the normalization of bullying, which is perceived as a form of discipline or a mental endurance test. This study aims to analyze how hierarchical structures in pesantren can lead to bullying and how such behavior becomes normalized in students' daily lives. This research employs a qualitative approach, using case studies based on observed incidents. Findings indicate that while hierarchy helps instill values of obedience and discipline, it can also create opportunities for bullying, which is often regarded as a tradition that junior students must endure. Case studies from several Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia, such as Pondok Pesantren Annur 2 Bululawang in Malang and Pondok Pesantren Husnul Khotimah in Kuningan, reveal that bullying persists in various forms. Therefore, it is essential to evaluate the hierarchical system to ensure that positive values are upheld without compromising students' psychological well-being. Additionally, effective preventive measures should be implemented to create a safe and supportive learning environment for all students.

Keywords: Islamic boarding school; hierarchical culture; bullying; santri tradition; Islamic education

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools are Islamic educational institutions that have long been known as the center of moral character formation for the younger generation. One of the aspects inherent in pesantren life is the existence of a hierarchical system that regulates the relationship between kyai, ustadz, senior students, and junior students. This system is considered a form of fostering discipline and respect for the elders. But in practice, this hierarchical culture also opens up opportunities for (Fajrul, 2022; Gumilang & Nurcholis, 2018; Mardiah Astuti et al., 2023; Najah & Lindasari, 2022) (Alfiyan, 2021) (Chonitsa et al., 2022) *bullying* activities which are often normalized by some Islamic boarding schools.

Bullying in the context of pesantren is not only in the form of physical violence, but can also be in the form of verbal and psychological violence, such as bullying, harassment, or excessive punishment given by senior students to junior students. This phenomenon is often considered a "tradition" that must be accepted by new students as part of the learning process. Therefore, it is important to examine how this hierarchical

culture has an impact on the psychological well-being of students as well as efforts that can be applied to prevent the normalization of bullying behavior in Islamic boarding schools. (Rahman et al., 2023) (Julianto, 2016; Muhammad Ikhsan, 2017)

Several cases of bullying in Islamic boarding schools have surfaced to the public in the near future. For example, in January 2023, a student with the initials DF (13 years old) at the Annur 2 Islamic Boarding School in Bululawang, Malang, was bullied by his peers which resulted in injuries and broken nostrils. In addition, in December 2023, a student with the initials H (18 years old) at the Husnul Khotimah Islamic Boarding School, Kuningan, was allegedly killed as a result of being ganged up by 18 of his friends. This phenomenon shows that bullying practices do not only occur in public schools but also in Islamic boarding schools.

This research has novelty in its focus which specifically relates the pesantren hierarchy system as an institutional cultural variable that can be a triggering factor for the normalization of bullying behavior. Unlike previous research that only highlighted bullying cases from the perspective of perpetrators and victims, this study integrates structural-sociological approaches with psychological studies to understand the dynamics of power, symbolic compliance, and group pressure in daily life in pesantren. Thus, this research makes a new contribution to the discourse of character education in the pesantren environment through a more critical and contextual analytical approach.

Meanwhile, the benefits are divided into two, namely theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it can be used as a reference in explaining the problem of bullying in Islamic boarding schools or other educational institutions. In addition, theoretically, this article is also useful as a reference for further research on bullying in Islamic boarding schools or schools, especially in the study of psychology, character education and moral education. This article is also useful practically, especially for readers in understanding the phenomenon of handling bullying in Islamic boarding schools or schools, so that it can provide reflection so that they have a common awareness of rejecting bullying behavior anywhere and anytime. This information also helps the educational community, especially the key groups of institutional managers (such as pesantren caregivers, pesantren administrators, school principals, and teachers, especially counseling guidance teachers) in understanding bullying, developing anti-bullying programs and applying the program. (Al Rashid & Gautama, 2023; Miftah et al., 2021) (Nashiruddin, 2019)

METHOD

In this article, a qualitative approach is used as a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written words from people or observed behaviors. The qualitative research method used in this study is case studies. Case studies are part of the research methodology where the subject matter is that a researcher is required to be more careful, thorough and in-depth in revealing a case, event, both individual and group. (Herliana & Purnomo, 2023; Nendyowati & Birowo, 2024; Yvonne O'Neill, 2011)

Data was collected through literature studies from several previously existing data. Data analysis was carried out with a descriptive approach to describe how the hierarchy in the pesantren can affect the behavior of students and how bullying can occur and be normalized. As well as taking cases that have occurred such as at the Annur 2 Bululawang Islamic Boarding School in Malang and the Husnul Khotimah Islamic Boarding School in Kuningan. In addition, media analysis and legal documents related to bullying cases in Islamic boarding schools are also used to enrich data.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study are divided into six discussions, with reference to the formulation of the existing problem, as follows:

Hierarchy in Islamic Boarding Schools

The hierarchical system in Islamic boarding schools usually consists of several levels, ranging from kyai as the highest leader, ustadz as teachers, senior students as supervisors, and junior students as students. This hierarchy serves to maintain order and provide opportunities for students to learn from their senior experiences. However, in some conditions, senior students feel that they have more authority over junior students, which can lead to abuse of power in the form of bullying.

Normalization of Bullying as a Tradition

In many pesantren the cause of bullying that occurs in pesantren is due to high seniority. Bullying cases that generally often occur are the perpetrator deliberately taking actions to make the opponent feel unconfident, inferior, fearful, misbehaved and weak. The perpetrator carried out this action by bullying, cornering and degrading the victim. In addition, the beginning of bullying begins between students often mocking each other, the practice of bullying is often considered part of a "mental exam" or "character building." Case studies at the Gontor Islamic Boarding School and an Islamic boarding school in Cirebon show that junior students often receive harsh treatment from their seniors as part of the tradition. This has led to many cases of bullying going unreported because it is considered part of a tradition that must be accepted. Another factor that causes the normalization of bullying is the existence of social pressure from fellow students and a lack of awareness of the psychological impact of these actions.

The Impact of Santri Bullying

In an educational institution, both formal and informal, cases of bullying violence must often occur at school. In Indonesia itself, cases of bullying at school have been rampant both at the elementary, secondary, and even tertiary school levels. This is very worrying because children should get safety and comfort both in the school environment and in the play environment. Victims of bullying will lose confidence and low self-esteem, to increase their self-esteem they make others targets for revenge, dominate and feel powerful. It is also associated with an age that is in the range of 12 -15 years, at this age adolescents are emotionally more labile and have a lot of conflicts due to the tendency to rebel against all rules. Therefore, the biggest factor that results in the severity of bullying is the seniority in the boarding house between the queues.

Bullying in the pesantren environment has a negative impact on the psychological, social, and academic condition of students. Some of the most common impacts include:

1. Mental and emotional disorders: students who are victims of bullying tend to experience depression, stress, anxiety, and even psychological trauma.
2. Decreased academic achievement: the pressure from bullying makes it difficult for students to focus on learning, which ultimately has an impact on declining academic scores.
3. Lonely behavior: Many victims of bullying are reluctant to interact with their friends or experience prolonged fear in the pesantren environment and even behave alone.
4. Repeated cycle of violence: Students who have been victims of bullying often become perpetrators when they are seniors, thus creating a cycle of repeated violence.

Cases of Bullying in Islamic Boarding Schools

The case of bullying in Islamic boarding schools is not a new phenomenon, but in recent years, this incident has begun to be revealed to the public. Some of the cases that have emerged include:

1. Annur 2 Islamic Boarding School Bululawang, Malang (January 2023): A student with the initials DF (13 years old) was bullied by his peers which resulted in injuries and broken nostrils.
2. Husnul Khotimah Islamic Boarding School Kuningan (December 2023): A student with the initials H (18 years old) was allegedly killed by 18 of his friends.
3. Gontor Islamic Boarding School, East Java (2022): A student died due to violence allegedly committed by senior students.

These cases prove that bullying in Islamic boarding schools is still a serious problem that needs to be addressed immediately.

Prevention efforts and solutions

Here are some things that can be done to reduce bullying cases in Islamic boarding schools, namely:

1. Strengthening sanctions: The government and Islamic boarding schools need to make stricter regulations related to bullying prevention, including strict sanctions for perpetrators.
2. Anti-bullying education: Students need to be given an understanding of the negative effects of bullying and the importance of creating a safe and comfortable environment.
3. Secure complaint system: Schools should provide a complaint mechanism that serves to protect victims from threats or pressures that lead to bullying cases.
4. Psychological assistance: Students who are victims of bullying must receive psychological assistance so as not to experience prolonged trauma. Likewise for students who are perpetrators because in some cases the perpetrators of bullying have psychological or mental disorders .

Implications of Research Results

1. Theoretically: this study reinforces Olweus' theory of bullying and how social

hierarchy can be a factor that exacerbates bullying in closed environments such as Islamic boarding schools.

2. Applied: this study provides insight for pesantren managers in supervising their students regarding cases of bullying hierarchy.
3. Basic concept linkage: The results of this study confirm that an under-supervised hierarchical system can be a trigger for a culture of recurrent violence.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussion of the research, it can be concluded that this study shows that the hierarchical cultural system in Islamic boarding schools, which although it has a role in shaping discipline and respect for authority, can also be a trigger for the normalization of bullying practices. The rigid hierarchy between senior students and junior students often opens up space for physical, verbal, and psychological violence that is disguised as a form of mental coaching. This phenomenon has a negative impact on the psychological condition of students, decreases academic achievement, and has the potential to create a cycle of violence that repeats from generation to generation. This serious impact demands a thorough evaluation of the social structure in the pesantren. Preventive measures need to be taken, such as the preparation of anti-bullying policies, the provision of a safe complaint mechanism, strengthening literacy awareness of violence, and psychological assistance for students who are victims. With this strategy, pesantren can become a healthier, safer, and supportive educational environment for students as a whole.

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