

Addressing Gender Bias and Bullying in Indonesian Islamic Boarding Schools: Challenges and Solutions

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Abstrak: Penelitian ini mengkaji masalah bias gender dan perundungan di pondok pesantren di Indonesia dengan tujuan untuk mengidentifikasi profil masalah, faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi, dan solusi yang dapat diterapkan. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah pendekatan kualitatif dengan kajian literatur yang mendalam dengan pendekatan pustaka dan beberapa jurnal yang membahas tentang bullying di sekolah ber asrama. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa bias gender termanifestasi dalam pembatasan akses pendidikan dan ekspektasi peran gender yang stereotip di kalangan santri. Pemisahan antara santri laki-laki dan perempuan sudah menjadi tradisi pesantren dengan tujuan agar akses pendidikan lebih terfokus. Namun, pandangan stereotip peran gender juga mempengaruhi berbagai kegiatan di pesantren. Perundungan muncul dalam bentuk intimidasi verbal, pengucilan sosial, dan kekerasan fisik antar santri, bahkan korban perundungan dapat mengalami tekanan psikologis yang signifikan. Implikasi dari penelitian ini adalah perlunya peningkatan kesadaran dan pendidikan tentang kesetaraan gender dan anti perundungan, adopsi kebijakan anti diskriminasi dan anti perundungan yang terstruktur, serta penguatan peran pengawas dan konselor di pesantren. Studi ini memberikan landasan untuk upaya lebih lanjut dalam mengembangkan kebijakan pendidikan inklusif dan strategi intervensi yang efektif untuk mengatasi masalah bias gender dan perundungan di lingkungan pendidikan pesantren.

Kata Kunci: *bias gender; perundungan; pesantren*

Abstract: This study examines the problem of gender bias and bullying in boarding schools in Indonesia with the aim of identifying the problem profile, influencing factors, and applicable solutions. The research method used is a qualitative approach with an in-depth literature review with a literature approach and several journals that discuss bullying in boarding schools. The research findings show that gender bias is manifested in restrictions on access to education and stereotyped gender role expectations among santri. The separation between male and female students has become a pesantren tradition with the aim of more focused access to education. However, stereotypical views of gender roles also affect various activities in pesantren. Bullying appears in the form of verbal intimidation, social exclusion, and physical violence between students, and even victims of bullying can experience significant psychological distress. The implications of this study are the need for increased awareness and education on gender equality and anti-bullying, the adoption of structured anti-discrimination and anti-bullying policies, and strengthening the role of supervisors and counselors in pesantren. This study provides a foundation for

further efforts in developing inclusive education policies and effective intervention strategies to address issues of gender bias and bullying in pesantren education settings.

Keywords: *bullying; gender bias; islamic boarding school*

INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools, known as *pesantren* in Indonesia, are essential institutions for shaping the character and religious education of students, or *santri*. These schools integrate religious teachings with practical skills and life values based on Islamic principles. Managed by a *kyai*, or spiritual leader, Islamic boarding schools offer a comprehensive education that covers Arabic language, Quranic interpretation, hadith, and *fiqh*, alongside daily activities grounded in religious values (Hafidzi, 2020; Ruslan et al., 2021).

Despite their significant role in instilling Islamic values, Islamic boarding schools encounter challenges such as gender bias and bullying incidents among students. Gender bias can lead to unequal treatment or opportunities for male and female students, impacting their personal development and mental well-being. Bullying, (Nurlelah, 2019) which can involve physical, verbal, or social harm, presents a serious issue in some boarding schools, affecting students emotionally and psychologically and disrupting the learning environment.

The *kyai's* leadership is pivotal in addressing these challenges and fostering a supportive and inclusive environment within Islamic boarding schools. By advocating for equality and respect among students, the *kyai* can help alleviate gender bias and bullying, ensuring a safe and nurturing space for all *santri*. Collaborative efforts involving the *kyai*, teachers, and students are crucial in cultivating a culture of mutual respect and understanding within the *pesantren* community.

While Islamic boarding schools play a fundamental role in providing religious education and practical skills to students in Indonesia, addressing issues like gender bias and bullying is crucial to maintain a positive and conducive learning environment. Through effective leadership and a commitment to fostering respect and inclusivity, Islamic boarding schools can continue to nurture the next generation of individuals grounded in Islamic values and principles. Addressing gender bias and bullying in boarding schools is crucial for fostering equal access to education and creating a safe learning environment for all students. Gender bias, manifested through unequal treatment and stereotypical attitudes, can hinder students' development and potential (Reisner et al., 2014). Bullying, including physical, verbal, and social intimidation, can lead to emotional distress and impact students' well-being. In Islamic boarding schools, maintaining traditional norms may perpetuate these issues, necessitating the involvement of key figures like *kyai* to address them effectively (Aini, 2021).

Efforts to combat gender bias and bullying require a holistic approach involving the entire school community. Education on gender equality and anti-bullying programs can serve as initial steps towards creating an inclusive environment. Building awareness and garnering support from clerics, teachers, and students is essential for fostering a dignified educational setting. By identifying root causes and engaging all stakeholders, boarding schools can cultivate a supportive educational experience irrespective of gender or

background. The implications of addressing these issues extend beyond individual well-being to societal inclusivity and equity. Striving for gender equality and a supportive learning environment aligns with broader goals of social justice and cultural development. By promoting respect for differences and implementing effective interventions, boarding schools can contribute to a more just and cultured society. Addressing gender bias and bullying in boarding schools is paramount for enhancing educational quality and student well-being. Through collaborative efforts, education on equality, and fostering awareness, boarding schools can create an environment where all students can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally (Abdullah et al., 2023; Ideham, 2022).

To address gender bias and bullying in *pesantren*, it is crucial to implement comprehensive strategies that involve various stakeholders. Research indicates that bullying prevention programs should involve assessing the issue, organizing school conferences, enhancing supervision, establishing anti-bullying rules, conducting classroom meetings, and involving parents. Factors contributing to bullying in *pesantren* often relate to seniority among students. Understanding the tendencies of bullying based on gender and birth order is essential in developing targeted interventions. Moreover, integrating teachings of fiqh across different schools of thought in *pesantren* curriculum can play a significant role in instilling values of equality and reducing negative behaviors. Studies have shown that the social context, including student-teacher relationships, plays a crucial role in addressing bullying behaviors. Effective anti-bullying programs globally have been found to reduce both perpetration and victimization of bullying. Furthermore, parental involvement and communication are vital in addressing bullying issues in *pesantren*. It is essential to consider the role of bystanders in either reinforcing or discouraging bullying behaviors (al-Banin, n.d.). Additionally, understanding parental perspectives on bullying is crucial for developing effective prevention strategies. In the context of *pesantren*, where interactions between teachers and students are extensive, implementing strategies to combat bullying requires a holistic approach that involves educational psychologists, administrators, parents, and the broader community. Emphasizing an egalitarian and non-discriminatory education system within *pesantren* can contribute to mitigating gender bias and bullying (Akbar, n.d.).

In Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia, gender bias and bullying are two issues that have long been a major concern in the development of Islamic religious education. Islamic boarding schools, as traditional educational institutions, play an important role in shaping the character and spirituality of the students. However, behind the brilliance of the Islamic values taught, there are real challenges related to gender equality and students' psychological safety. On the other hand, the problem of inter-student bullying also haunts the boarding school environment. Forms of physical, verbal, and social intimidation are not uncommon, resulting in severe emotional and mental distress for victims (Abdusshomad, 2024). The learning environment, which should be a place to grow and develop, feels unsafe for many students. With bullying, the learning process is disrupted, hampering students' ability to focus and develop optimally.

The research gap in the given context lies in the lack of specific research that explores the impact of traditional culture on resistance to change, gender equality, and bullying prevention in *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools). While the importance of

addressing these issues is acknowledged, there is a need for research that delves into the specific traditions and cultural practices within *pesantren* that contribute to resistance to change and hinder efforts to create an inclusive learning environment. Understanding the root causes of resistance to change within the context of *pesantren* culture will help in identifying effective strategies to overcome these barriers. Additionally, there is a gap in research regarding the role of various stakeholders, such as teachers, parents, religious leaders, and the wider community, in addressing issues of gender bias and bullying in *pesantren*. Collaborative efforts from all relevant parties are essential to bring about positive change. Further research is needed to explore the perspectives and experiences of these stakeholders, as well as their willingness and capacity to address these issues. Furthermore, there is a need for research that examines the specific interventions and strategies that can effectively address gender bias and bullying in *pesantren*. Identifying and evaluating evidence-based interventions tailored to the unique cultural context of *pesantren* will contribute to the development of comprehensive and effective approaches (Agustina & Psikoterapi, 2021; Alwi et al., 2023).

The research objective is to conduct a comprehensive study that addresses the research gap by exploring the impact of traditional culture on resistance to change, gender equality, and bullying prevention in *pesantren*. The objective is to gain a deep understanding of the root causes of resistance to change within the context of *pesantren* culture and identify effective strategies to overcome these barriers. Additionally, the objective is to examine the perspectives and experiences of various stakeholders in addressing issues of gender bias and bullying in *pesantren*, and to identify evidence-based interventions that can effectively address these issues.

METHODS

The research method used to answer the questions in the title "Overcoming Gender Bias and Bullying in Islamic Boarding Schools: Challenges and Solutions" required a comprehensive and diverse approach to understanding and addressing this complex issue. First, the study adopted a descriptive approach to thoroughly describe the situation of gender bias and bullying in boarding schools (Jaya, 2020). The initial step involved identifying relevant research variables, including the types of gender bias that existed in the boarding school environment and the forms of bullying that occurred among *santri*. Data was collected through participatory observation methods, interviews with *santri*, *kyai*, and education staff, as well as documentation studies to obtain a comprehensive picture of the issue. Second, the study used qualitative methods to explore individual perceptions and experiences related to gender bias and bullying. The selection of appropriate respondents, such as *santri* who may have been victims or perpetrators of bullying, as well as *kyai* who had significant influence in the *pesantren* environment, was the focus (Armia, 2022; Azhari et al., 2023).

The analytical techniques that were used in this method included content analysis, thematic analysis, comparative analysis, and conceptual analysis. Through content analysis, researchers examined and analyzed relevant literature on gender bias and bullying in *pesantren*, understanding the influencing factors, challenges faced, and solutions that had

been proposed. Finally, conceptual analysis helped in understanding and explaining the concepts that appeared in the related literature, such as gender bias, bullying, *pesantren*, and Islamic education, building a strong conceptual framework.

By using these analytical techniques, researchers gained an in-depth understanding of gender bias and bullying in *pesantren*, as well as the associated challenges and solutions. This analysis helped in identifying key findings, developing strong arguments, and drawing informative conclusions in this study. Through this literature approach, the researcher was able to utilize existing knowledge and engage in critical discussion of relevant issues with the ultimate goal of addressing gender bias and bullying in *pesantren*.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Role and Responsibility of the Kyai (Caregiver) in Student Development

Kyai, or spiritual leaders in *pesantren*, have a central role in student development. They are not only religious teachers, but also authoritative figures responsible for the spiritual and moral life of the *santri*. Kyai are in charge of guiding, teaching, and advising students in various aspects of life. They also have a role as guardians of Islamic traditions and values in the *pesantren*. The kyai's responsibilities include supervising the education curriculum, fostering discipline, resolving conflicts, and being a role model in the daily life of *santri*. The presence of the kyai as an authoritative figure is very influential in shaping the character and personality of the *santri*. The presence of kyai also represents the continuity and sustainability of the Islamic education tradition in Islamic boarding schools, maintaining the continuity of generations of religious educators and teachers in this educational environment.

Through this very important role, the kyai has a great influence in shaping the unique educational atmosphere of the boarding school, where religious values, culture, and knowledge are applied in the daily lives of students. Thus, the role and responsibility of the kyai is very significant in fostering students to become individuals who are faithful, noble, and beneficial to society.

Pesantren leadership is characterized by charismatic, transformative, and democratic leadership styles. One key issue within *Pesantren* is the interpretation of the concept of "qawwām", where kyais predominantly associate this role with men. While traditional culture often dictates a sole leader model, some *pesantren* have adopted a collective leadership approach. Research has shown that Kyais exhibit transformative leadership qualities, including charismatic leadership, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Al-Amruzi & Faralita, 2022). The decisions made by Kyais regarding curriculum adoption can influence the sub-culture and educational orientation of *santri*. Effective kyai leadership, particularly through a charismatic style, can successfully shape the character of students, fostering independence, responsibility, sociability, diligence, and discipline (Hafidzi, 2020).

Negative Impact of Gender Bias on Student Learning Experience

Gender bias and gender stereotyping are significant issues in educational settings, including in *pesantren* in Indonesia. Gender bias refers to unfair or unequal attitudes or

treatment of individuals based on their gender. Gender stereotypes, on the other hand, are generalized views or expectations attached to men and women based on traditional gender roles. In educational settings, gender bias and stereotypes can be reflected in a variety of ways (Akbar, n.d.). For example, there is a tendency to assume that men are better at math and science, while women are better at languages and arts. Gender-based selection or division of roles and activities can also occur, such as assigning domestic responsibilities to women or assuming that men are better suited to lead.

Gender bias can have a significant negative impact on students' learning experience. First, gender bias can hinder access to equal educational opportunities. For example, female students may have limited access to certain educational materials or not be given equal opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities. This can hinder the development of female students' full potential.

Secondly, gender bias can affect judgments and expectations of students' abilities. If teachers or instructors have strong gender stereotypes, they may tend to judge students based on these prejudices rather than on their actual achievements or potential. This can lead to unfair differences in treatment and reduce students' motivation and self-confidence. In addition, the psychological impact of gender bias can also adversely affect students' mental well-being. Students who feel unappreciated or unequal because of their gender may experience stress, anxiety or depression. An educational environment that does not support gender equality can also create insecurity and discomfort for students.

In *pesantren*, where religious values and traditions play an important role, it is important to address gender biases and stereotypes so that education can be inclusive and dignified for all students. Promoting gender equality in access, participation and assessment can improve the quality of education and the overall well-being of students. This is also in line with Islamic teachings that emphasize the importance of justice, equality and respect for individuals regardless of gender. By addressing gender bias, education in *pesantren* can become more inclusive and provide equal opportunities for all students to grow and develop optimally (Luluardi et al., 2023).

Bullying in an Educational Environment

Bullying is a serious problem that occurs in educational settings and has a significant impact on student well-being. Bullying can be defined as repeated aggressive or intimidating behavior towards someone who has an imbalance of power or lesser power. This behavior can be physical, verbal or social bullying. Types of Bullying (Coyle et al., 2021):

1. Physical Bullying: Includes behaviors such as hitting, kicking, or physically damaging the victim's belongings.
2. Verbal Bullying: Includes hurtful verbal insults, teasing, or threats.
3. Social Bullying: Involves rejecting, ostracizing, or spreading harmful gossip about the victim to socially isolate them.

Bullying in schools can be influenced by several factors. First, an unsupportive school environment or lack of supervision from teaching staff can create conditions where bullying behavior can develop without supervision. In addition, the existence of an

inequality of power between the perpetrator and the victim is also a factor that influences the occurrence of bullying. For example, students who are physically stronger or have social power may use their advantages to bully other students.

Personal factors can also play a role in causing bullying behavior (Abimanyu & Saraswati, 2022). For example, a lack of social skills or emotional problems in bullies may cause them to use bullying as a way to get attention or cope with their personal problems. In addition, social norms that allow or even support bullying behavior can also influence the prevalence of bullying in schools.

Profile of Gender Bias and Bullying Problems in Islamic Boarding Schools

After conducting a comprehensive research related to the problem of gender bias and bullying in Islamic boarding schools, a profile was obtained that describes the characteristics of this problem as well as significant key findings. The research identified that the problem of gender bias in boarding schools includes several aspects. First, there is unequal access to education and participation in religious activities. Female *santri* often experience restrictions in accessing certain religious learning or do not have equal opportunities to engage in important religious activities. In addition, there is a stereotypical view of gender roles, where expectations of female and male *santri* tend to differ and often limit their aspirations for future personal and professional development (Ruslan et al., 2021).

Second, gender bias is also reflected in the division of tasks and responsibilities in *pesantren*. Female *santri* are often given domestic tasks or household chores, while male *santri* are more directed to other activities that are considered more "masculine". This reflects the traditional pattern that underlies gender roles in the *pesantren* environment (Al-Amruzi & Faralita, 2022).

The research findings also reveal the characteristics of the bullying problem in Islamic boarding schools. Bullying occurs in various forms, including verbal intimidation, social exclusion, and even physical violence between students. *Santris* who are victims of bullying often experience significant psychological and emotional distress, which can affect their mental and academic well-being.

Factors contributing to the problem of bullying in boarding schools include the power imbalance between perpetrators and victims, social norms that reinforce bullying behavior, and the lack of effective supervision from education staff. Moreover, the tendency to let bullying problems go undetected or ignored is also part of the profile of this problem (Aini, 2021).

The main findings of this study highlight the negative impact of gender bias and bullying on students' education and well-being in boarding schools. It was found that female *santri* often experience inequality in their educational experiences and a lack of support for the development of their potential. Meanwhile, victims of bullying experience significant psychological and social distress, which can disrupt the teaching-learning process and hinder their ability to develop optimally.

In addition, the findings also identify that the problems of gender bias and bullying in Islamic boarding schools are not only related to the internal environment of the boarding

school, but also influenced by external factors such as social norms and values of the society surrounding the boarding school(Akbar, n.d.).

By understanding the profile of the problem of gender bias and bullying and the key findings related to this issue, it is hoped that this research can provide a solid basis for designing appropriate and evidence-based solutions to address this challenge. Efforts to change traditional patterns and build an inclusive and safe educational environment for all students in *pesantren* will be an important step towards positive change in the Islamic education system in Indonesia.

Challenges in Overcoming Gender Bias and Bullying in Islamic Boarding Schools

The results show that overcoming the problem of gender bias and bullying in Islamic boarding schools is a complex challenge and requires a holistic approach. The following is an overview of the main challenges faced as well as the factors that influence efforts to address these issues(Hafidzi, 2020).

1. Traditional Norms and Values: *Pondokpesantren* are educational institutions that are strongly associated with traditional values and strong social norms. The main challenge is to change long-established mindsets and practices related to gender roles and conflict handling among *santri*. This change requires effective communication and sustained efforts to create awareness of the importance of gender equality and respect for differences.

2. Power Inequality: Issues of gender bias and bullying are often related to power inequalities between the parties involved. Kyai and educational staff often have a high degree of authority, while *santri*, especially female *santri*, may feel they do not have the power or authority to stand up against injustice or bullying behavior. This challenge requires an approach that focuses on empowering students and strengthening their position within the educational environment.

3. Lack of Supervision and Mentoring: Some cases of bullying may not be detected or addressed quickly due to a lack of effective supervision and mentoring from education staff. This challenge emphasizes the importance of increasing the role and involvement of education staff in supervising activities at the boarding school and providing necessary support to students.

Through an in-depth understanding of the challenges faced and the factors that influence the handling of gender bias and bullying issues in Islamic boarding schools, strategic steps can be formulated to effectively face these challenges. A collaborative, comprehensive, and sustainable approach will be key in formulating solutions that have a positive and sustainable impact in an effort to overcome this problem(Adhha, 2024).

Solutions and Recommendations for Overcoming Gender Bias and Bullying in Islamic Boarding Schools

Based on the results of the research conducted related to the issue of gender bias and bullying in Islamic boarding schools, several solutions and recommendations have been formulated to effectively address these challenges. Here are some strategies or programs that can be implemented(Aini, 2021; Ernawati, 2022; Nurlelah, 2019):

1. Awareness Raising and Education

The first solution is through raising awareness and education about the importance of gender equality and handling bullying in *pesantren*. Formal and informal education programs can be held for kyai, education staff, *santri*, and parents on the concept of gender equality, the negative effects of gender bias, and the adverse effects of bullying. Awareness campaigns can also be conducted to promote the values of inclusivity, respect for differences, and respect for human rights for all individuals.

2. Training and Capacity Building

Kyai and education staff need to be trained in conflict management, bullying prevention and handling cases of gender discrimination. This training can include effective communication techniques, understanding of gender-based violence, and peaceful conflict resolution strategies. This capacity building will help them to take a more proactive role in addressing problems in the *pesantren*.

3. Implementation of Anti-Bullying Policy

Islamic boarding schools need to adopt a clear and structured anti-bullying policy. This policy should include the definition of bullying, reporting procedures, case handling steps, and sanctions imposed on bullying perpetrators. The implementation of this policy should be supported by effective communication to the entire boarding school community to ensure understanding and compliance with the established rules.

4. Student Empowerment

Student empowerment programs need to be improved to provide equal opportunities for all *santri*, regardless of gender. This can be done through the formation of gender advocacy groups, open discussion forums, or extracurricular activities that support leadership development and diversity.

5. Parent and Community Involvement

The involvement of parents and the community around the boarding school is very important in supporting efforts to overcome the problem of gender bias and bullying. Parents need to be empowered as partners in the education and protection of their children. Community programs can also be held to raise awareness and encourage active participation from the entire community in creating a safe and inclusive environment for all.

6. Periodic Evaluation and Monitoring

Finally, it is important to carry out regular evaluation and monitoring of the implementation of the proposed solutions. These evaluations can help identify successes and challenges in addressing the issue of gender bias and bullying, so that necessary adjustments and improvements can be made to achieve more optimal results. By implementing these strategies and programs in a comprehensive and sustainable manner, it is hoped that boarding schools can become a more inclusive, safe and supportive environment for all students. Collective efforts and strong commitment from all relevant parties will be key in creating positive and sustainable changes in the education system in boarding schools.

The Psychological and Social Impact of Bullying on Victims

Bullying has a serious impact on victims, both psychologically and socially. Psychologically, victims of bullying may experience stress, anxiety and depression due to the pressure they experience every day. They may lose self-confidence and feel isolated or unsafe in the school environment (Azizah et al., 2020).

Socially, victims of bullying may have difficulty interacting and forming relationships with peers. They may become more introverted or withdraw from social settings due to the negative experiences they have had. These social impacts may continue into adulthood and affect the victim's ability to form healthy interpersonal relationships in the future.

The importance of addressing the problem of bullying in educational settings cannot be overstated. Schools have a very important role in preventing and addressing bullying by implementing effective anti-bullying policies and providing psychological assistance for victims. In addition, education on the importance of respecting differences and raising awareness of the impact of bullying can also help drive cultural change in schools towards a safe, inclusive and supportive environment for all students. By preventing and addressing bullying, education can become a more positive and supportive environment for students' growth and development.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals serious problems related to gender bias and *bullying* in pesantren - boarding schools-. From the research results, it can be concluded that gender bias manifests in access restrictions and stereotypical gender role expectations, while bullying appears in the form of intimidation and social exclusion among *santri*. The main challenges faced in addressing these issues include strong traditional norms, power inequality, and lack of effective supervision. However, strategies such as awareness raising, training, anti-discrimination policies, and student empowerment can help address these issues. The summary of findings from this study highlights the profile of gender bias and bullying issues in Islamic boarding schools, including unequal access to education, different gender role expectations, and negative impacts on students' well-being. The key findings also include internal and external factors that affect addressing the issues, such as traditional norms, lack of awareness, and community involvement. In addition, the findings suggest that education and training, anti-bullying policies, and strengthened supervisor roles can be effective solutions.

The findings of this study may have limited generalizability beyond the context of Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia. The unique cultural and social factors specific to *pesantren* may influence the manifestation of gender bias and bullying, making it challenging to apply the findings to other educational settings or cultural contexts. Other factors contributing to these issues, such as socio-economic factors or external influences, were not extensively explored, limiting the comprehensive understanding of all the factors influencing gender bias and bullying in boarding schools. Future research should consider conducting longitudinal studies to gain insights into the long-term effects of gender bias and bullying in pesantren. Comparative studies across different types of educational

settings can help identify similarities and differences in the manifestation and impact of these issues.

The results of the study have significant implications for education in boarding schools and the general public. Addressing the issues of gender bias and bullying will promote the values of equality and respect for differences among *santri*. This will have a positive impact on students' mental and academic well-being and help build an inclusive educational environment. At the general community level, these efforts will create greater awareness of gender and violence issues and promote broader social change.

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