



Integration of Medical Roles and Islamic Spirituality in the Health of Students at Islamic Boarding Schools

Nur Azizah A.S^{1*}, Dewi Masithah¹, Rahmadinah Diva Zhavira¹, Rizqi Mahmud Idris¹, Khadijah Khairul Bariyah²

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ABSTRACT

The mental health of students in Islamic boarding schools is often neglected due to stigma, low literacy, and misunderstandings linking it to supernatural factors such as possession. This condition makes students reluctant to seek medical help and prefer a purely spiritual approach. This community service program aims to improve mental health literacy by integrating medical approaches and Islamic spirituality, which students and caregivers find more easily acceptable. The activity was carried out at Hidayatullah Al-Muhajirin Bangkalan Islamic Boarding Schools involved 30 students in counseling sessions, 48 students, and 15 caregivers in free health check-ups. The activity methods included an initial survey, interactive counseling, discussions, pre- and post-test questionnaires, and basic health services. Results showed an average increase in students' knowledge scores of 13 points after the counseling, indicating the program's effectiveness in improving mental health awareness. This increased insight also encouraged students to discuss psychological issues without stigma. The material was delivered by integrating Islamic values such as dhikr (remembrance of God), prayer, and meditation (contemplation). The free health check-ups also emphasized the importance of physical and mental balance from an Islamic perspective. This activity has implications for ongoing educational forums, caregiver training in early detection of mental disorders, and the development of medical-spiritual-based counseling services. This program has proven effective as an intervention model that can be replicated in other Islamic boarding schools, while also strengthening community involvement in creating a more caring and supportive environment for students' mental health.

Keywords: Mental health; Religion and spirituality; public health service; Islamic Boarding Schools

INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) are Islamic educational institutions that play a strategic role in shaping their students' spiritual and intellectual character. However, despite this crucial role, the mental health of their students is often neglected. High academic and spiritual pressures, such as the obligation to memorize the Quran, maintain discipline, and undergo rigorous academic evaluations, have triggered stress, anxiety, and even depression among students (Dewi et al., 2021; Guntur et al., 2022). Previous studies also indicate that over 60% of students experience anxiety symptoms, especially when facing memorization exams, while counseling or psychological support remains very limited (Bau et al., 2022).

A major problem in Islamic boarding schools is the widespread misconception that supernatural forces cause mental disorders. Cases of psychosis, schizophrenia, and severe anxiety disorders are often misinterpreted as possession by spirits, leading students to seek spiritual healing rather

¹ Faculty of Medicine, Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Surabaya

² Research and Community Development Assistant, Faculty of Medicine, Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Surabaya

**) corresponding author*

Nur Azizah A.S
Email: dr.nurazizah@unusa.ac.id

than medical intervention (Lienardy, 2022). Many Islamic boarding schools still rely on traditional ruqyah (exorcism) as the primary treatment for mental disorders, reinforcing the stigma surrounding psychiatric care (Arni & Halimah, 2020). Furthermore, seven out of ten Islamic boarding schools surveyed still rely on spiritual approaches as the primary method for treating mental disorders without involving professional medical personnel. This results in students with severe mental disorders, such as schizophrenia, often not receiving appropriate treatment and experiencing a higher rate of relapse than the general population (Susanti & Tiara, 2024). Although spirituality plays a crucial role in mental health, neglecting medical explanations and treatment often results in worsening symptoms and delaying recovery (Makhruzah et al., 2021).

Another challenge is the lack of mental health education among Islamic boarding schoolteachers and caregivers. Most ustadz (teachers) and kyai (Islamic scholars) are not trained to recognize the early signs of mental health disorders, leading to undiagnosed and undertreated cases of psychological distress in Islamic boarding schools (Apriliana & Nafiah, 2021). The absence of a mental health support system makes it difficult for students to seek help without fear of judgment (Daulay et al., 2021). Many teaching staff in Islamic boarding schools lack a basic understanding of mental health disorders, leading them to respond inappropriately, such as suggesting increased religious practices without considering the need for psychological or medical intervention. Furthermore, peer pressure within the Islamic boarding school community often discourages students from discussing their mental health conditions openly, leading those with mental health disorders to isolate themselves from their peers (Muttaqin et al., 2024).

Despite the many challenges ahead, the need for educational forums on mental health is growing, necessitating mental health interventions in educational settings—schools, Islamic boarding schools, and elsewhere. Some Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) have combined Islamic psychology with modern psychology for a more holistic approach to the mental health of their students (Hidayati et al., 2022). However, implementation remains inconsistent due to the many pesantren's shortage of trained personnel and institutional support for such initiatives (Guntur et al., 2022).

Several previous studies and community service activities have emphasized the importance of mental health interventions in Islamic boarding schools. Santri Sehat Mental program implemented at Assalafi Al-Fithrah Islamic Boarding School (PP. Assalafi Al-Fithrah), for example, demonstrated an increase in students' understanding after medical and spiritual-based counseling (Azizah et al., 2024). This intervention has been shown to increase awareness regarding the early detection of mental health disorders, strategies for preventing deviant behavior, and appropriate steps for dealing with individuals with mental health issues. The integration of medical approaches and Islamic spirituality is an innovative step to address the stigma that still considers mental disorders solely due to spiritual factors, such as possession or weak faith. Social support in the form of ustadz/kyai, coupled with the reinforcement of Islamic spiritual values such as dhikr (remembrance of God), prayer, and meditation, can serve as a protective factor in maintaining students' mental health.

Based on actual conditions, two main issues require attention. First, the persistent misconception that mental disorders are synonymous with possession or supernatural phenomena. This belief makes some students prefer traditional healing rituals over professional medical assistance.

LITERATURE OR CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Mental health issues in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) have received increasing attention due to awareness of the high levels of psychological stress among students. Previous (Dewi et al., 2021; Guntur et al., 2022) has shown that high academic and spiritual pressures, such as the obligation to memorize the Quran and maintain strict discipline, can trigger anxiety and depression in students. However, mental health literacy in Islamic boarding schools remains low, and misunderstandings persist, often linking mental disorders to supernatural phenomena such as possession or disturbances

by spirits (Arni & Halimah, 2020; Lienardy, 2022). This stigma leads to delays in diagnosis and appropriate treatment, which negatively impacts the students' quality of life.

Recent literature emphasizes the importance of integrating medical science and Islamic spirituality to address these challenges. Hidayati et al. (Hidayati et al., 2022) explain that Islamic boarding schools play a crucial role in character formation, thereby requiring mental health interventions tailored to their religious and cultural contexts. The integration of spiritual practices such as prayer, dhikr, and meditation into modern psychological approaches, including Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (Çınaroğlu, 2024), has been shown to increase the acceptance and effectiveness of mental health programs in Muslim communities. The holistic approach proposed by classical scholars such as al-Balkhi also emphasizes the close relationship between spiritual and psychological health and bridges classical Islamic values with modern psychiatry (Tengku Kamarulbahri et al., 2024).

Furthermore, community-based educational interventions have proven effective in improving mental health literacy in religious institutions. The Santri Sehat Mental Program (Azizah et al., 2024) demonstrated that integrated medical and Islamic spiritual education can improve understanding of early detection, prevention, and treatment of mental health disorders among Islamic students. These findings align with public health perspectives that emphasize the importance of social support and culture-based approaches in reducing stigma (Mildaeni & Huda, 2024; Yudha Hafidh Pratama et al., 2023). Thus, the implementation of the medical and Islamic spiritual integration framework in Islamic boarding schools not only contributes to reducing the stigma against mental disorders but also strengthens the values of balance (*tawazun*) and holistic well-being according to Islamic teachings.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This community service activity was held in the Hall of Islamic Boarding Schools Hidayatullah Al Muhajirin, Bangkalan, on Saturday, May 3, 2025. The main partners of the activity were students and guardians of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) who were directly involved in the program's implementation. The target participants were 30 students who attended counseling sessions, 48 students, and 15 guardians (*ustadz/ustadzah*) who received free health checks. The target groups were selected because they are at a crucial stage of growth and development, so mental and physical health interventions are essential for fostering resilience and healthy self-awareness.

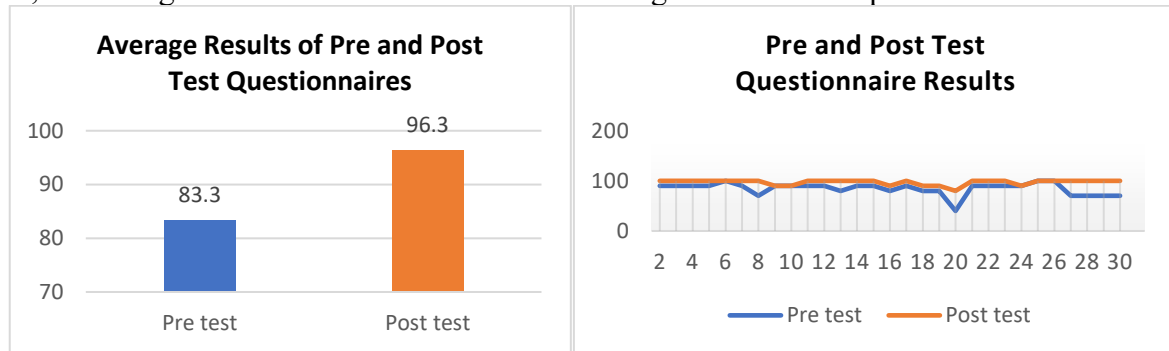
The activity procedure was divided into three stages: preparation, implementation, and evaluation. During the preparation stage, the community service team conducted an initial survey and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with partners to identify needs and develop an activity plan tailored to field conditions. During the implementation stage, the counseling team presented "Integrating the Role of Medicine and Islamic Spirituality in the Health of Students in Islamic Boarding Schools." This material was delivered in an interactive counseling session accompanied by a question-and-answer session to gauge the students' level of understanding. Knowledge was evaluated by comparing students' insights before and after the counseling session using pre- and post-test questionnaires. Furthermore, this activity included free health checks, including anthropometric tests, blood pressure measurements, blood sugar checks, health consultations with the lecturers' medical team, and free medication as needed.

The evaluation phase involved a simple analysis of the students' pre- and post-test knowledge results and documentation of the health service outcomes. The activity's results were then presented in a community service report and prepared as outputs for media articles and scientific publications. With this approach, it is hoped that the integration of medical roles and Islamic spirituality can be comprehensively assessed, both in improving mental health literacy and in enhancing access to basic health services within the Islamic boarding school environment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Graphs

The following graph shows the increase in students' knowledge at Hidayatullah Al-Muhajirin Bangkalan Islamic Boarding Schools based on pre-test and post-test results conducted before and after the counseling. A simple analysis reveals a 13-point difference in average pre-test and post-test scores, indicating an increase in students' understanding of the material presented.



This community service activity, entitled "Integrating the Role of Medicine and Islamic Spirituality in the Health of Students at Islamic Boarding Schools," successfully increased the insight and awareness of the partners of Hidayatullah Al-Muhajirin Bangkalan Islamic Boarding Schools regarding the importance of medicine and Islamic spirituality in mental health within Islamic boarding schools and the community. The following are some summary results of the outreach activities:

1. The outreach team provided in-depth insight into the relationship between the role of medicine in mental health and Islamic spirituality, which is still relatively unknown in Islamic boarding schools.
2. The outreach team provided information regarding the background of mental health conditions in everyone, various factors, indicators of mental health problems, the impact of not maintaining mental health, treatment and prevention methods for mental health issues, the relationship between mental health and an Islamic perspective, and the role of Islamic spirituality in mental health within Islamic boarding schools.
3. The outreach team also offered free health checkups to Hidayatullah Al-Muhajirin Bangkalan Islamic Boarding School, which serves 48 students and 15 caregivers, providing effective healthcare access during outreach activities at the Islamic boarding school. Through these checkups, the medical team offers appropriate care and treatment and information on the importance of physical health to raise awareness among partners.

(a)



(b)





Picture 1. (a) Session of providing material with the students; (b) Completing the questionnaire for the students; (c) Question and answer session with the students; (d) Health consultation session with the medical counseling team; (e) Group photo of the implementation team with the Islamic boarding school administrators; (f) Group photo of the FK UNUSA students and the students of Hidayatullah Al-Muhajirin Bangkalan Islamic Boarding School.

4. This outreach activity began with a pre-test and post-test questionnaire on Islamic Medicine and Spirituality in Student Health. All results, along with the average scores for the pre-test and post-test questionnaires, can be seen in the following graph (can be seen in graphs 4.1.1).

Based on the results of the pre-test and post-test questionnaires on the topic of medical and Islamic spirituality counseling in the health of Islamic students, there was an increase in scores among students Hidayatullah Al-Muhajirin Islamic Boarding Schools, who had participated in the activity with an average percentage increase in scores of 13, thus this illustrates an increase in knowledge by the participants regarding the topic of Medical and Islamic Spirituality in the Health of Islamic Students. Understanding the topic of Medical and Islamic Spirituality in the Health of Islamic Students has made the participants have a deep understanding regarding the importance of knowledge regarding the background of mental health conditions in each individual, various factors, indicators of mental health problems, the impact if individuals do not maintain their mental health, treatment and prevention methods for mental health problems, the relationship between mental health and Islamic perspectives, and the role of Islamic spiritualism in mental health in the Islamic boarding school environment.

DISCUSSION

The urgency of this program stems from the real challenges within Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), where the stigma surrounding mental disorders, low mental health literacy, and misconceptions linking them to the supernatural remain strong (Bendeck Sotillos, 2021; Guntur et al., 2022). These conditions discourage students from seeking medical help and prefer solely spiritual approaches, resulting in suboptimal mental health interventions. An integrative approach that combines evidence-based medical practices with Islamic spirituality offers an innovative solution because students and caregivers more readily accept it. Islamic values such as tawakkul (reliance on God) and sabr (patience), along with religious practices such as dhikr, prayer, and salat (prayer), have been shown to increase emotional resilience and support mental well-being (Çınaroğlu, 2024; Hassan, 2021). This integration also aligns with the classical Islamic psychological tradition, which

emphasizes the close link between spiritual and psychological health, as expressed by al-Balkhi (Tengku Kamarulbahri et al., 2024). A previous study, conducted through the Mental Health Santri program at Assalafi Al-Fithrah Islamic Boarding School (PP. Assalafi Al-Fithrah), demonstrated that medical and spiritual-based educational interventions improved students' understanding of early detection of mental disorders and prevention strategies (Azizah et al., 2024).

The results showed an average increase of 13 points in students' knowledge scores from pre-test to post-test, confirming the effectiveness of this educational intervention in improving mental health literacy. This increased insight made students more open to discussing mental health issues, as the material was delivered by integrating familiar Islamic spiritual values (Tengku Kamarulbahri et al., 2024; Yudha Hafidh Pratama et al., 2023). Furthermore, the implementation of free health checks involving 48 students and 15 caregivers emphasized the importance of the relationship between physical and mental health, in line with the holistic perspective of Islamic teachings that emphasizes the balance of both (Mildaeni & Huda, 2024). This provides a new understanding that maintaining mental health is not contrary to faith, but rather part of worship and self-care. Furthermore, this activity contributes to reducing stigma, strengthening awareness that medicine and spirituality can go hand in hand, and facilitating a more supportive environment for students to seek help without fear or shame (Andini et al., 2021; Bendeck Sotillos, 2021).

The implications of this activity indicate the need for ongoing educational forums within Islamic boarding schools, including training for caregivers in early detection of symptoms of mental health disorders and providing access to simple, accessible mental health services for students. The intervention model based on integrating medicine and Islamic spirituality implemented in this activity has proven effective in increasing literacy and awareness, thus having the potential to be replicated in other Islamic boarding schools with similar conditions. However, a challenge remains, namely the reluctance of students and caregivers to discuss mental health directly due to persistent stigma. Therefore, recommended follow-up actions include distributing mental health content leaflets, developing counseling services based on integrating medical and Islamic spirituality, and strengthening collaboration with higher education institutions and hospitals to provide professional support and expand the program's impact to other Islamic boarding schools.

CONCLUSIONS

Community service activities that integrate medical approaches and Islamic spirituality in the health of students at Islamic Boarding School Hidayatullah Al-Muhajirin Bangkalan have shown significant effectiveness in improving mental health literacy, as demonstrated by an increase in the average knowledge score of students by 13 points between the pre-test and post-test. This program confirms that medical interventions with Islamic spiritual values can reduce stigma, broaden understanding of the relationship between physical and mental health, and increase students' openness in discussing psychological issues. Therefore, this program contributes to strengthening the literature on the integrative medical-spiritual approach in the context of Islamic boarding schools, while practically can be used as a model for sustainable interventions for other Islamic educational institutions. Furthermore, it can be recommended to hold regular educational forums, training for student caregivers (ustadz/ustadzah) in early detection of mental disorders, distribution of educational materials in the form of leaflets, and collaboration with educational institutions and health facilities to expand the reach and programs of infectious diseases.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declared that no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the authorship and publication of this article.

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