



RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Phenomenological Inquiry into Discipline Formation among Early Childhood Learners: Islamic Parenting Practices in a Pesantren Setting

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Abstract

Despite the growing prominence of Islamic parenting literature, few studies have empirically explored how consistent Islamic parenting is practiced and experienced in pesantren-based early childhood education settings. This study aims to fill this gap by systematically investigating the lived experiences of parents and teachers at PAUD Az-Zikro Islamic Boarding School in shaping young children's discipline through Islamic parenting principles. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, data were collected from four key informants—including parents, teachers, and caregivers—via in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, with rigorous validation through member checking and triangulation. The results reveal that the formation of discipline in early childhood is fostered by four interconnected components: adult exemplary behavior, consistent alignment of home-school rules, habituation of worship and daily routines, and ongoing value internalization through gentle reminders. Indicators of discipline observed include independence, responsibility, voluntary obedience, time management, and self-awareness. The unique pesantren environment, characterized by strong value alignment and integrated religious-social routines, reinforces the effectiveness of these strategies, although challenges remain from media and peer influences. This study advances theoretical understanding and provides actionable insights for educators and policymakers seeking to implement holistic character education strategies in both Islamic and broader early childhood contexts.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education; Islamic Parenting; Discipline Formation; Pesantren; Character Development; Phenomenological Approach

INTRODUCTION

The formation of a child's temperament, moral character, and behavioral discipline is fundamentally shaped by experiences in early childhood education and the parenting approaches implemented by both parents and teachers (Santrock, 2011; Wanda & Mulyana, 2019). The issue of discipline among young children remains a global and local concern; for example, UNESCO (2023) and the Ministry of Education and Culture Indonesia (Kemendikbud, 2014) have reported increasing challenges regarding

attention span, self-regulation, and behavioral discipline in early childhood, both in formal education and at home. A recent survey by Pew Research Center (2021) indicated that nearly 40% of parents in Southeast Asia view the decline of discipline and self-control among children as a major concern, exacerbated by digital exposure and shifting family structures. In the pesantren (Islamic boarding school) context, studies have found that discipline is not only an educational target but also a core spiritual and social value, making it a unique domain of inquiry for child development research (Lubis et al, 2023; Dasir & Munawiroh, 2020).

Despite growing research on parenting, most studies on Islamic parenting and discipline remain largely normative or quantitative, often focusing on theoretical ideals or broad surveys, rather than in-depth exploration of lived experiences (Amalia et al, 2025; Agustina & Tago, 2024; Nudin, 2020). There is a lack of empirical, phenomenological investigation into how caregivers in pesantren-based early childhood education settings actually implement, negotiate, and embody Islamic parenting values and discipline in daily

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practice. This gap is critical given that the process of internalizing discipline in Islamic culture is deeply intertwined with religious rituals, daily habits, emotional bonds, and contextual challenges (Harahap, 2023; Satria et al, 2025). Furthermore, recent studies have highlighted the need to examine how social, technological, and environmental factors—such as peer interactions and media exposure—intersect with Islamic parenting to shape disciplinary outcomes (Alvanda et al, 2024; Anderson & Bushman, 2018).

To address this research gap, the present study aims to systematically explore the real-life experiences of parents and teachers at PAUD Pesantren Az-Zikro Banyuasin II in applying Islamic parenting principles to instill discipline in early childhood. Specifically, the research seeks to understand not only the internal processes of value transmission and behavioral regulation but also the influence of external environments and the collaborative roles of home and school. The research objective can be stated explicitly as follows: This study aims to explore and analyze how consistent Islamic parenting practices, as lived and narrated by parents and teachers in a pesantren-based early childhood setting, shape the formation of discipline among young children.

This investigation is anchored in a robust and multidimensional theoretical framework that bridges the rich tradition of classical Islamic scholarship—including the Qur'an, Hadith, and foundational texts by luminaries such as Al-Ghazali—with major theories of developmental psychology and contemporary educational science (Al-Ghazali, 1998; Bowlby, 1969; Bandura, 1977; Kohlberg, 1981; Hurlock, 1999). Within Islamic parenting, key principles such as *uswah hasanah* (exemplary conduct), *ta'wid* (habit formation), and *muroqobah* (gentle but firm supervision) form the epistemological basis for nurturing children's character (Goeke-Morey & Cummings, 2017; Jailani, 2023). These pillars are critically aligned with modern psychological constructs: for example, *uswah hasanah* finds resonance in Bandura's social learning theory, which emphasizes that children learn and internalize behavioral norms primarily through observing role models (Bandura, 1977; Amalia et al, 2025; Agustina & Tago, 2024). The *ta'wid* principle aligns with both Vygotsky's notion of scaffolding and the importance of consistent routine in child development (Vygotsky, 1978; Daradjat, 2006), while *muroqobah* shares conceptual space with Bowlby's (1969) theory of attachment, wherein nurturing, consistent supervision builds children's sense of trust and emotional security.

Moreover, Islamic epistemology places unique emphasis on the spiritual intentionality (*niyyah*) and habituation of righteous acts (*'amal shalih*) in daily life, which are reinforced through rituals, parental modeling, and narrative storytelling (Madum & Daimah, 2024; Saida et al, 2023). Kohlberg's (1981) stages of moral development and Lickona's (2012) framework for character education further support the notion that discipline and moral conduct are most effectively cultivated when ethical values are consistently embedded within both home and educational environments (Lickona, 2012; Ismail, 2016).

Building on these converging insights, this study seeks not merely to describe theoretical constructs but to synthesize and contextualize them, examining how Islamic principles and contemporary pedagogical approaches intersect to foster the holistic development of discipline. In particular, the dynamic relationship between spiritual formation, social modeling, and emotional guidance is examined within the unique setting of a pesantren-based

early childhood institution (Lubis et al, 2023; Harahap, 2023).

The novelty of this research lies in its phenomenological approach, which privileges the lived, emotionally, and spiritually meaningful experiences of both parents and teachers. This approach enables a deeper exploration of value transmission processes—capturing not only the observable practices but also the internal negotiations, dilemmas, and transformative moments that accompany the everyday work of nurturing discipline (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Baker & Edwards, 2012). By centering on the voices and narratives of caregivers, this study uncovers the subtle interplay between individual agency, family dynamics, institutional expectations, and broader sociocultural pressures—including the influences of digital technology, media exposure, peer networks, and evolving home-school partnerships (Rohmat et al, 2024; Fahriansyah et al, 2025; Pew Research Center, 2021).

Prior scholarship has rarely addressed this intersection in depth, particularly in the context of Indonesian pesantren or similar Islamic educational settings, nor has it sufficiently highlighted how contemporary phenomena—such as digital parenting challenges and shifting social networks—reshape traditional paradigms of Islamic parenting and discipline (Alvanda et al, 2024; Satria et al, 2025). This study responds to that gap, offering fresh empirical insight and integrative analysis.

In sum, the present research fills a vital empirical and theoretical void in the literature on discipline formation through Islamic parenting. By linking time-honored values with current societal complexities and adopting a phenomenological lens, this study makes a meaningful contribution to Islamic education, developmental psychology, and the science of character education. The findings and interpretations aspire to support parents, educators, and policymakers in developing effective, culturally sensitive, and contextually adaptive strategies for raising disciplined, morally grounded children amid the complexities of contemporary childhood and family life.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participant characteristics and research design

This research employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to deeply explore the lived experiences of Islamic parenting practices in shaping early childhood discipline at PAUD Pesantren Az-Zikro Banyuasin II. Informants were selected through strict inclusion and exclusion criteria: only adults aged 28–43 years, who were actively involved in the daily care and education of preschool-aged children at the pesantren, were included. The participants consisted of parents, teachers, and caregivers directly responsible for the children's upbringing, while individuals not involved in day-to-day parenting or outside the age range were excluded (Santrock, 2011; Wanda & Mulyana, 2019). Each participant had a background in at least secondary education, ensuring a basic understanding of both the theoretical and practical aspects of Islamic parenting.

Because it can reveal the subjective experiences and meanings that informants attach to Islamic parenting practices in their lives, a qualitative approach with a phenomenological method is employed in this study. Phenomenology was selected due to its capacity to provide a detailed explanation of social phenomena from the viewpoint of the person, particularly in addressing the "why" and "how" of these events as they are experienced,

processed, and interpreted by participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). When analyzing the social, emotional, and spiritual effects of consistently implementing Islamic parenting, this approach is extremely pertinent. The participants' spiritual and religious characteristics are also taken into account in this study as crucial components in the application of Islamic parenting.

Participants were chosen on the basis of their active participation in Islamic worship and kid-friendly activities at home and in early childhood education settings. The length of time they have been involved in early childhood education and how consistently they apply Islamic principles in their daily lives are other factors taken into

account. Additionally, each participant has a foundation in secondary to university education, which allows them to comprehend the theoretical and practical tenets of Islamic parenting.

The third informant, a 40-year-old woman, is the parent of a child enrolled in early childhood education. The fourth informant is a 35-year-old mother of a pupil enrolled in early childhood education. All informants provided their agreement after being briefed on the study's objectives and methods, and the research was carried out with the institution's approval. The participants received no monetary compensation.

Table 1. Details of Sample Size and Reasons for Informant Selection

No.	Informant Code	Role/Background	Reason for Inclusion
1	I1	Parents of PAUD Az-Zikro students with Islamic parenting	Extensive experience in consistent Islamic parenting
2	I2	Early Childhood Education teachers involved in discipline	Direct observation of parenting influence on children's discipline
3	I3	Dormitory caretaker	Actively involved in religious activities and child supervision
4	I4	Parents with religious education background	Provides perspective combining religious knowledge and home practice

Sampling procedures

In order to choose informants who are thought to be most pertinent and skilled in regularly implementing Islamic parenting practices, the purposive sample technique is employed. The selection of informants was based on their direct engagement in the upbringing and education of children in the pesantren setting. Interviews and observations at home and at school, when the informants had direct contact with the children, were used to gather data. Among the participants' general details are: The first informant is a 28-year-old woman who teaches early childhood education. The second informant is a 43-year-old woman who serves as the vice principal and an early childhood education instructor. The third informant, a 40-year-old woman, is the parent of a child enrolled in early childhood education. The fourth informant is a 35-year-old mother of a pupil enrolled in early childhood education. All informants provided their agreement after being briefed on the study's objectives and methods, and the research was carried out with the institution's approval. The participants received no monetary compensation. To maintain confidentiality and ensure transparency, informants were anonymized using unique codes. Table 1 provides an overview of participant codes and selection rationales:

Measures and covariates

Data were collected through three main techniques: (1) in-depth semi-structured interviews, (2) participant observation, and (3) document analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Baker & Edwards, 2012). In-depth interviews comprised 72 open-ended questions covering various dimensions of Islamic parenting, discipline strategies, daily routines, and challenges. Example interview questions included: "How do you teach your child discipline through daily worship?" and "What are the biggest obstacles you face in maintaining consistency between home and school rules?" Participant observation was conducted at both home and school to capture

authentic parent-child and teacher-child interactions, rituals, and the natural application of Islamic values. Field notes, photographs, and institutional records were collected to enrich the contextual understanding (Goeke-Morey & Cummings, 2017).

The researcher applied the bracketing (epoche) technique to minimize personal bias, consciously setting aside prior assumptions and focusing solely on the participants' subjective experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Ongoing reflective journaling and peer debriefing were used to maintain objectivity throughout data collection and analysis.

Data analysis

Data were analyzed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) through several systematic steps (Smith et al., 2009; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). First, interview recordings were transcribed verbatim. Second, open coding was conducted to identify significant statements and preliminary themes. Third, thematic categorization was undertaken, linking emergent codes to theoretical constructs of Islamic parenting and discipline. The iterative process included revisiting transcripts, comparing themes across cases, and synthesizing findings into broader categories (Bowlby, 1969; Bandura, 1977). To strengthen trustworthiness, researcher triangulation (multiple researchers cross-checking the data), source triangulation (data from parents, teachers, caregivers), and method triangulation (interview, observation, documentation) were applied.

To enhance the validity and credibility of findings, member checking was conducted by sharing synthesized themes and interpretations with participants for their feedback and confirmation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Triangulation and peer debriefing supported the rigor of data interpretation. An audit trail documenting analytic decisions further reinforced transparency and dependability (Baker & Edwards, 2019).

Ethical Considerations and Confidentiality

The research was conducted in accordance with ethical standards for studies involving human participants. Written informed consent was obtained from all informants, after a thorough explanation of the study's objectives, methods, and confidentiality measures. The study was approved by the Universitas Bina Darma institutional ethics committee. All participant identities were anonymized, and data were securely stored, accessible only to the research team. Participants received no financial incentives for their involvement.

RESULTS OF STUDY

This study reveals several main themes related to the formation of discipline in early childhood through the application of Islamic parenting by parents and teachers at PAUD Az-Zikro Islamic Boarding School. The findings are organized thematically, each supported by narrative introduction, representative quotes from diverse informants, and synthesis of what these results reveal about the unique pesantren setting.

Exemplary Behavior as the Foundation of Discipline

One of the most prominent themes emerging from the data is the importance of exemplary behavior shown by adults as a foundation for discipline in children. Informants repeatedly expressed that children are more likely to develop discipline when they witness parents and teachers consistently demonstrating the desired behaviors. A teacher (I2) described, *"If I want my students to greet politely, I have to show that habit first every day when I enter the classroom."* A parent (I1) shared, *"Children wake up for dawn prayers without being told, simply because they see us do it as a family every morning."* This direct modeling forms the basis for children to imitate positive actions, which gradually become ingrained in their daily conduct. Children are observed to spontaneously remind one another to practice good habits, indicating that the behavior has become internalized.

Consistency and Alignment of Home–School Rules

Another major finding relates to the alignment and consistency of rules between home and school. Informants noted that clear and consistent regulations, applied by both teachers and parents, help to establish stability and minimize confusion for children. For example, a parent (I4) remarked, *"If school prohibits bringing a phone, we also enforce that rule at home, so children get the same message."* Similarly, a teacher (I2) explained, *"We regularly coordinate with parents about discipline, so children follow the same patterns everywhere."* The consistency in rules and expectations enables children to adapt to routines more easily, and reduces conflicting messages about appropriate behavior.

Worship Habits and Spiritual Routines

The setting of the pesantren, rich with worship and spiritual routines, plays a central role in the development of discipline. Informants described how daily practices, such as praying together, reading the Qur'an, and reciting prayers before and after activities, are not only rituals but become habits that build discipline. A parent (I3) stated, *"My child now prays before eating without being reminded because it*

is already a habit, both at home and at school." Children are also observed reminding their parents or peers when a ritual is forgotten, reflecting how these routines are deeply embedded. The habituation of worship activities helps to establish discipline that is not just about compliance, but is also rooted in a sense of personal responsibility and spirituality.

Value Internalization and Daily Reminders

The data show that children's discipline is also built through the regular internalization of Islamic values such as patience, honesty, and responsibility. Teachers and parents employ gentle reminders to reinforce these values, especially during moments of conflict or forgetfulness. One teacher (I2) shared, *"If children fight, I remind them that Allah loves those who are patient. It's more effective than simply saying 'don't fight'."* A parent (I1) noted, *"If my child refuses to pray, I remind them gently, and usually they respond positively because they understand the underlying value."* Over time, these reminders help children develop self-control and an awareness of the consequences of their actions.

The Influence of Media, Peers, and Environment

While the pesantren environment provides strong support for discipline, informants identified several external factors that could either strengthen or disrupt children's discipline. Some parents (I1, I3) mentioned the influence of media, particularly digital devices, on routines such as sleep and study time: *"Sometimes my child watches YouTube late at night, so it's harder to get them to nap on time."* The school and parents work together to monitor and regulate media use, but challenges remain. Peers also act as social controllers, with children often reminding each other to follow rules or join worship activities.

Indicators of Discipline Observed

Based on interviews and observations, several discipline indicators consistently emerged among the children at PAUD Az-Zikro Islamic Boarding School. One key indicator is independence, where children are able to complete daily tasks such as tidying up, preparing for prayer, or helping with chores without the need for close supervision from adults. Responsibility is also evident as children consistently demonstrate the ability to complete assigned tasks and take care of their own belongings. Obedience is observed not only as compliance with rules, but as voluntary adherence rather than actions driven solely by fear of punishment. The children also show strong time and task discipline, adhering to established schedules for prayer, study, play, and rest with regularity and reliability. Lastly, self-awareness becomes apparent as children are able to recognize their mistakes and make efforts to correct them, often doing so independently and without being prompted by adults. These indicators together reflect the holistic development of discipline fostered through the collaborative efforts of parents, teachers, and the supportive pesantren environment.

Thematic Matrix

To further clarify the relationship between the identified themes and field data, **Table 2** presents a summary of the key themes, representative informant quotes, and the main discipline indicators observed among the children.

Table 2. Thematic Matrix of Discipline Formation Experiences at PAUD Az-Zikro Islamic Boarding School

Theme	Informant Quote (Code)	Discipline Indicator
Exemplary Behavior	“Children greet each other because we do it first every day.” (I2)	Politeness, imitation
Rule Consistency (Home–School)	“We enforce the same rules at home as at school.” (I4)	Routine compliance, stability
Worship Habituation	“My child now prays before eating without being told.” (I3)	Habitual routine, responsibility
Value Reminders	“I remind kids that Allah loves patient children.” (I2)	Self-control, patience
Environmental & Media Influence	“YouTube sometimes disrupts nap time.” (I1)	Adaptability, need for guidance

The pesantren setting demonstrates unique strengths: a high level of value alignment between home and school, a tightly integrated community, and daily reinforcement of discipline through both religious and social routines. These factors combine to create an environment in which discipline is not only expected but naturally cultivated. However, some limitations are noted. The study’s findings are based on a small group of informants within a specific pesantren context, which may limit their broader applicability. Furthermore, while the pesantren model fosters a strong foundation for discipline, challenges such as media influence and changing family dynamics remain.

In summary, the process of discipline formation at PAUD Az-Zikro Islamic Boarding School emerges from a combination of exemplary adult behavior, consistent home–school collaboration, worship-based routines, ongoing value internalization, and support from the surrounding environment. These processes produce observable indicators of discipline—independence, responsibility, self-awareness, and routine adherence—that are reinforced through both daily practice and a strong, shared value system within the pesantren setting.

DISCUSSION

This study offers important insights into how early childhood discipline is shaped through the lived experience of Islamic parenting in a pesantren-based educational environment. The findings demonstrate that discipline formation at PAUD Az-Zikro is not merely the result of explicit rule enforcement but a holistic process that involves exemplary adult modeling, consistent home–school collaboration, daily habituation of religious practices, and the nurturing of core Islamic values such as patience, responsibility, and self-control. These results confirm and extend previous literature that highlights the central role of social modeling and value transmission in moral development (Bandura, 1977; Bowlby, 1969; Rahman et al, 2022; Amalia et al, 2025).

Critically, this study contextualizes social learning theory within an Islamic pedagogical framework by illustrating how *uswah hasanah* (exemplary conduct) and *ta’wid* (habit formation) are enacted not only through verbal instruction, but also through repeated collective practice and immersive daily routines. This process supports the assertion that the integration of religious ritual with daily discipline routines produces stronger internalization of values among young children (Goekemorey & Cummings, 2017; Saida et al, 2023). The synergy between home and school in the pesantren context emerges as a distinctive strength, reinforcing previous research that suggests consistent value alignment and community support enhance the effectiveness of character education (Wanda & Mulyana, 2019; Ismail, 2016). In addition, the findings show that discipline is maintained through

positive, affective engagement—such as gentle supervision (*muroqobah*) and spiritual reminders—rather than reliance on punitive measures, reflecting the principles of attachment and emotional security described by Bowlby (1969).

The study also highlights new and emerging challenges to discipline formation, including the influence of digital media, peer dynamics, and evolving family structures. These external factors are increasingly relevant in the contemporary Indonesian context, where exposure to technology and diverse social environments can both support and disrupt the process of discipline acquisition (Anderson & Bushman, 2018; Pew Research Center, 2021; Alvanda et al, 2024). The phenomenological approach employed in this study provides a deeper, more nuanced understanding of how caregivers negotiate these challenges and adapt Islamic parenting strategies in response to changing realities, which previous large-scale quantitative studies may overlook (Helena et al, 2020; Baker & Edwards, 2012).

From a theoretical perspective, this research extends the discussion on social learning theory by incorporating elements of Islamic epistemology, highlighting the importance of spiritual intention (*niyyah*) and the embedding of ritual acts (*‘amal shalih*) within daily discipline routines (Madum & Daimah, 2024; Jailani, 2023). This synthesis between classical Islamic scholarship and developmental psychology offers a unique and contextually relevant model of discipline formation for Muslim-majority societies, which is still underrepresented in mainstream global literature (Fahriansyah et al, 2025; Satria et al, 2025). The study also reveals that effective character education programs should not only focus on rule compliance but also foster emotional bonds, spiritual awareness, and community engagement.

The practical implications of these findings are significant for parents, teachers, and educational policymakers. First, the importance of consistent collaboration between home and school should be operationalized through regular parent–teacher communication, shared discipline frameworks, and collective rituals. Training programs for parents and teachers can further promote the internalization of Islamic values and effective discipline strategies, especially in the face of digital and media influences (Rohmat et al, 2024; Ismail, 2016). Digital literacy for families and educators is also critical to help manage external influences and preserve the positive outcomes associated with pesantren-based discipline.

Despite these strengths, several limitations must be acknowledged. The small sample size and the focus on a single pesantren context may limit the generalizability of the findings. Social desirability bias could also have influenced participants’ responses, as discipline is a highly valued trait in both Islamic culture and the pesantren setting. Furthermore, time and resource constraints limited the exploration of certain external variables, such as the

impact of broader community or socio-economic status. Future research should adopt a mixed-methods approach, incorporate larger and more diverse samples, and explore discipline formation in different educational and cultural contexts—including comparisons with non-pesantren early childhood settings (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015; Nudin, 2020). Longitudinal studies and action research involving interventions on digital literacy or parenting programs could also generate more robust, generalizable evidence and offer concrete solutions for practitioners.

In summary, this study advances the understanding of early childhood discipline within Islamic educational environments by demonstrating that discipline is most effectively fostered through a combination of exemplary adult behavior, habitual spiritual practice, value-based communication, and strong home-school partnerships. The integration of Islamic and psychological theories in discipline formation highlights the need for culturally and contextually sensitive models that address both traditional values and modern challenges. These findings have the potential to inform policy, enrich educational practice, and inspire further scholarly exploration in the field of Islamic education and child development.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study underscores the pivotal role of consistent Islamic parenting practices in shaping early childhood discipline, particularly within the unique environment of a pesantren-based early childhood education setting. The main findings reveal that discipline is most effectively cultivated through exemplary adult behavior, the consistent alignment of rules between home and school, the habituation of daily religious routines, and the internalization of core Islamic values such as patience, responsibility, and self-awareness. These processes are not only instrumental in fostering children's moral and spiritual growth but also create a supportive environment where discipline becomes a natural and intrinsic part of daily life.

Importantly, the study contributes to both theoretical and practical knowledge by bridging Islamic educational values and contemporary child development perspectives. The phenomenological approach employed here offers a nuanced understanding of how lived experiences, community values, and home-school collaboration intersect to support the holistic development of discipline. The findings also highlight new challenges posed by external influences such as digital media, peer interactions, and evolving family dynamics, indicating that effective discipline strategies must be adaptive and context-sensitive.

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DECLARATION

Ethical Approval and Consent to Participate

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards applicable to research involving human participants. Written informed consent was obtained from all individuals who participated in the study. The research protocol was approved by the institutional ethics committee of Universitas Bina Darma.

Consent for Publication

Not applicable. The manuscript does not include any individual data in the form of images, videos, or other identifiable personal details.

Availability of Data and Materials

The datasets generated and/or analyzed during the current study are not publicly available due to concerns regarding participant confidentiality. However, the data are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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Authors' Contributions

T. Fitri was responsible for designing the study, conducting interviews, analyzing data, and drafting the manuscript. Itryah contributed to methodological supervision, provided theoretical and editorial feedback, and revised the final version of the manuscript. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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