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Developing a Strategic Model of Child-Friendly *Pesantren* Climate to Prevent Sexual Violence

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DEVELOPING A STRATEGIC MODEL OF CHILD-FRIENDLY *PESANTREN* CLIMATE TO PREVENT SEXUAL VIOLENCE

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Abstract

Sexual violence in pesantren remains a pressing concern despite the implementation of national child protection policies. This study developed a strategic model of a child-friendly pesantren climate to prevent sexual violence by integrating institutional, cultural, and relational dimensions. Using a qualitative multiple-case study design, data were collected from 15 pesantren in West Java, Jakarta, and Banten through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and non-participatory observations to ensure credibility and depth. Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's interactive model — comprising data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing — supported by NVivo 12 for thematic coding. The findings revealed that preventing sexual violence cannot rely solely on written policies and staff training. It also required cultural mediation that translates formal rules into daily practices and an alliance between staff and families that reconceptualizes institutional capacity as a shared relational commitment. These mechanisms, together with institutional child protection policies, inclusive pedagogy, physical and psychological safety, student agency, and parental involvement, formed a comprehensive model for cultivating a child-friendly pesantren climate. This model advanced theoretical discourse by reframing the hidden curriculum as a vehicle for safeguarding and by positioning family involvement as integral to institutional competence, while offering a practical roadmap for policymakers and practitioners to strengthen child protection in Islamic boarding schools.

Keywords: *Child-Friendly Climate; Pesantren; Sexual Violence Prevention; School Climate.*

A. Introduction

Globally, sexual violence in educational institutions remains a persistent threat to children's rights and well-being. Numerous studies have shown that schools—despite being envisioned as safe spaces for learning—can become sites of abuse, especially when institutional safeguards are weak or absent. In Indonesia, this concern becomes more pronounced in *pesantren*, a traditional Islamic boarding school system that plays a vital role in moral and religious education (Hasibuan et al., 2025; Burga & Damopolii, 2022). As educational institutions deeply embedded in cultural and spiritual life, *pesantren* are often viewed as ideal environments for nurturing students' character, discipline, and independence (Sadiah, 2022; Hasibuan et al., 2025). They are expected to serve not only as centers of learning but also as communities that protect and develop children holistically (Haidar et al., 2023).

However, this idealized image stands in stark contrast to growing reports of sexual violence within *pesantren*. In 2023 alone, the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) recorded 1,478 cases of violence against children, with 615 cases involving sexual abuse. Although these numbers span various educational settings, *pesantren* are increasingly appearing in national media reports as sites where such violations occur. This trend has raised alarm among parents, educators, and policymakers, casting doubt on the safety and accountability mechanisms within these institutions (Dewi & Ansori, 2023; Misdah et al., 2025).

To respond to this alarming trend, the Indonesian government has introduced a series of national policies aimed at promoting safer educational environments. These include the Regulation of the Minister for Women's Empowerment and Child Protection No. 8/2014 on Child-Friendly Schools, which emphasizes the integration of children's rights into all school policies and practices. This was followed by the Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation No. 82/2015, which provides guidelines for the prevention and management of violence in educational settings, and the Regulation No. 30/2021, which focuses specifically on the prevention and handling of sexual violence in higher education environments. Complementing these general

regulations, the Regulation of the Minister of Religious Affairs No. 73/2022 was issued to directly address the prevention and handling of sexual violence in religious educational institutions, including *pesantren* (Huda et al., 2025; Husaini Zuhri & Huda, 2024).

Collectively, these policies signal the government's formal commitment to institutionalizing a child protection agenda across Indonesia's diverse educational landscapes. However, the continuing—and in some cases, rising—cases of violence within *pesantren* indicate that these legal frameworks have not yet translated into meaningful protective mechanisms at the ground level (Jamaludin & Prayuti, 2022; Ma'arif et al., 2023). This persistent policy-practice gap highlights the urgent need to move beyond regulatory compliance toward the development of context-sensitive, institutional models that can foster a genuinely child-safe environment in *pesantren* (Maghfiroh et al., 2024; Wasehudin et al., 2023).

This dissonance between policy and practice underscores the urgent need for systemic reform. Addressing violence in educational institutions must be viewed as a shared responsibility, with school leaders playing a central role. Schools—especially those with residential settings like *pesantren*—are not only centers of instruction but also strategic arenas for violence prevention. (Crooks et al., 2019). Studies have consistently shown that the prevalence of violence in schools negatively affects learning outcomes and impedes the holistic development of children (Fry et al., 2018). Hence, preventive efforts must be coordinated across stakeholders and extend beyond the school's internal mechanisms to include broader community engagement (Binti Zulfikri, 2024; Pepler & Craig, 2011) .

One strategic approach to address this persistent problem is through the development of a child-friendly *pesantren* climate. Such a strategy entails creating an institutional environment that promotes, respects, and safeguards children's rights by embedding values of non-violence, inclusivity, and participatory engagement into all aspects of school life. It requires strengthening the capacity of both schools and families through effective, sustained partnerships

(Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). From an institutional perspective, this approach is strongly aligned with the principle of maximizing human capital and organizational capacity to achieve holistic educational outcomes (Kholik et al., 2023; Kholik & Laeli, 2020).

Although the concept of child-friendly schools has been widely explored within the context of general education (Alfina & Anwar, 2020; Majdi & Ichsan, 2021; Suherman et al., 2023), research that specifically addresses *pesantren* remains scarce. *Pesantren* possess distinctive characteristics in terms of organizational structure, religious culture, and social relations that differ significantly from general schools. Moreover, studies on violence prevention in educational institutions have generally emphasized the importance of school climate as a determining factor (Aryani et al., 2021; Fry et al., 2018; Jamaludin & Prayuti, 2022). In particular, Halliday et al., (2024) demonstrate a strong inverse correlation between negative school climate and the incidence of violence, while Ristiasih & Asih (2021) highlight how a supportive climate can significantly reduce school disruptions and violent behavior. Furthermore, the success of child-friendly environments often hinges on the strength of family-school partnerships (Clark-Louque & Latunde, 2019). Yet few have systematically integrated the dimensions of a child-friendly climate with the cultural context of *pesantren* and family involvement. This gap highlights the need for developing a strategic model specifically designed to create a child-friendly *pesantren* climate as a means of preventing sexual violence.

The novelty of this study lies in the integration of child-friendly school climate, child protection, and family–school partnership concepts within a framework tailored to the socio-cultural context of *pesantren*. Unlike previous research, which has primarily focused on general schools or emphasized a single aspect, this study develops a comprehensive strategic model to prevent sexual violence by strengthening a child-friendly *pesantren* climate. In doing so, it not only contributes theoretically to the scholarship on school-based violence prevention but also provides a practical roadmap for *pesantren* to establish safe, inclusive, and protective environments for children.

The main objective of this research is to design a strategic model of a child-friendly *pesantren* climate—embedded within its unique cultural and organizational structures and reinforced through family–school partnerships—that can serve as a reference point for strengthening child protection in Islamic educational institutions.

B. Method

This study adopted a qualitative approach with a multiple-case study design, aiming to explore in depth the institutional and familial strategies for preventing sexual violence through the development of a child-friendly *pesantren* climate. The focus was directed toward understanding how *pesantren* as educational institutions enhance their internal environment and relational networks to foster safe, inclusive, and responsive spaces for children. The research was conducted in 15 *pesantren* across three provinces in Indonesia: West Java, Jakarta, and Banten (Ar-Ridho Sentul, Al-Umm Aswaja, Al Badariyah, Mama Bakry Sadeng, Daarul Mughni Al-Maliki, Pon Daruttauhid, Al Inayah, Husnayain, Darussaadah, Al-Hidayah, Al Washilah, Al Wasathiyah, La Royba, Darul Amanah and AL Azhar Ummu Suwainah). These *pesantren* were selected based on their public commitments or ongoing initiatives to develop child-friendly programs, making them relevant sites for investigating both structural readiness and cultural adaptation in child protection efforts.

Participants in this study included *pesantren* leaders (*kiai* and *nyai*), teachers (*ustadz/ ustadzah*), students (*santri*), and parents. The selection was conducted using purposive sampling (Chu & Chang, 2017). Data collection was carried out using triangulation techniques. Researchers collect data while testing the credibility of the data, namely checking the credibility of the data using various data collection techniques and various data sources (Walidin et al., 2023; Tabrani ZA et al., 2024). In-depth interviews were conducted with leaders, teachers, and parents to elicit their narratives, perceptions, and institutional strategies regarding the prevention of sexual violence. Focus group discussions (FGDs) were carried out among student groups and parents to explore collective

perceptions and experiences concerning safety, trust, and participation within the *pesantren*. Non-participatory observations were undertaken to examine the daily rituals, teacher–student interactions, and spatial-symbolic elements that contribute to the *pesantren* climate.

Data were analyzed using qualitative inductive analysis through Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles and Huberman). All data were transcribed and organized using NVivo 12, with thematic coding guided by Saldana's (2021) framework through both inductive and deductive strategies. The resulting codes were then grouped into conceptual categories such as policy commitment, school climate, child-friendly culture, family–school partnership, and risk reduction to construct a strategic model. Data validity was maintained through triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing with experts in child protection and Islamic education.

To guide the data analysis process, this study employs a conceptual framework developed based on a review of the literature and the actual conditions of *pesantren*. This framework illustrates the relationship between institutional structures, local cultural values, and child protection strategies through a cultural mediation approach. These dynamics are illustrated in the initial conceptual model presented in Figure 1.
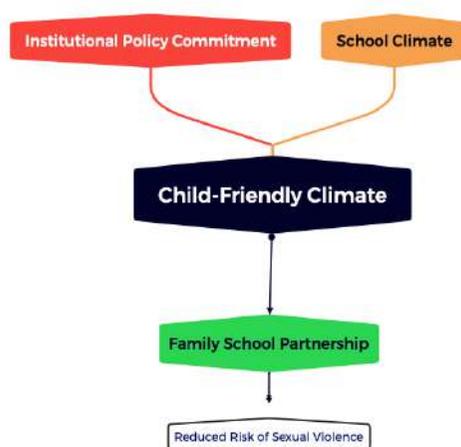

Figure 1. Initial Conceptual Model of Violence Prevention in Pesantren

C. Results and Discussion

The results are derived from interviews, focus group discussions, and observations across 15 *pesantren* in three provinces. The findings are organized thematically based on the conceptual framework and coding analysis using NVivo 12. Each theme reflects critical dimensions of the child-friendly *pesantren* climate and highlights strategic elements that contribute to preventing sexual violence in Islamic boarding schools.

1. Results

This study explores the development of a strategic model for creating a child-friendly *pesantren* climate aimed at preventing sexual violence. By integrating cultural, educational, and policy-based approaches, the research highlights effective strategies to safeguard students, strengthen institutional resilience, and promote *pesantren* as safe, nurturing, and protective learning environments.

a. *Factors contributing to sexual violence in pesantren*

Field data obtained from 15 *pesantren* across West Java, Jakarta, and Banten revealed three dominant factors that contribute to the occurrence of sexual violence in boarding school settings: (1) limited sexual education and knowledge, (2) the absence of formal supervision and monitoring mechanisms, and (3) the lack of institutional policy frameworks. These three aspects were consistently identified by *pesantren* leaders, teachers, students, and parents during in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and non-participatory observations.

The first factor concerns the absence of comprehensive sexual education within the *pesantren* environment. Teachers, students, and even parents repeatedly highlighted that discussions around bodily autonomy, consent, and personal boundaries are almost non-existent. One teacher in *Pesantren* Al Wasathiyah openly admitted during an interview that "*Children learn about it from their peers, and it often comes in the form of jokes that carry negative connotations. We as teachers rarely talk about it explicitly because it is*

considered taboo" (Interview with Teacher, Al Wasathiyah, 2024). A *santri* from Darul Amanah gave a similar testimony, explaining that *"We never talk about these things in class, so most of us don't know what is right or wrong. Sometimes we only hear about these matters through rumors or jokes"* (Interview with *Santri*, Darul Amanah, 2024). This collective silence, reinforced by cultural taboos, was repeatedly described by informants as creating an environment where perpetrators can operate unnoticed because students do not recognize or cannot articulate inappropriate behaviors.

The second factor relates to inadequate supervision mechanisms, especially in dormitories where students spend most of their time. Several teachers and dormitory supervisors acknowledged gaps in monitoring practices, particularly at night. A teacher at Daruttauhid stated, *"We trust all the ustadz and senior santri, but in reality, no one patrols at night. We assume everything is fine, but actually we cannot be sure what happens behind closed doors"* (Interview with Teacher, Daruttauhid, 2024). This vulnerability was confirmed by students themselves. One *santri* from Husnayain noted, *"At night the rooms are quiet, and if something happens, no one will know. We sometimes feel scared but do not know whom to tell"* (Interview with *Santri*, Husnayain). Similarly, a dorm supervisor from Al Inayah reflected on the limited capacity of the institution, saying, *"The number of staff is not enough to monitor all rooms every night. Sometimes one person supervises several blocks at once, so it is impossible to see everything"* (Interview with Ustadz, Al Inayah, 2024). These statements illustrate how structural and staffing limitations create unmonitored spaces where violations can occur without detection.

The third factor identified in the field concerns the lack of codified institutional policies to address sexual violence. Although some *pesantren* display posters or deliver sermons on moral behavior, respondents indicated that these measures remain largely informal and lack clear reporting or follow-up procedures. An administrator at Al Washilah explained, *"If an incident occurs, it is usually just discussed among the management; there is no written guide or standard procedure that everyone can follow. We just handle it case by case"* (Interview with Management, Al Washilah, 2024). This ambiguity was echoed

by students, who expressed uncertainty about how to act if they experience or witness inappropriate behavior. A *santri* from La Royba stated, *"We don't know who to tell if something bad happens. Sometimes we just keep it to ourselves because we are afraid or embarrassed"* (Interview with *Santri*, La Royba, 2024). Such testimonies reveal that without clear and accessible procedures, students often choose silence, thereby reinforcing a culture of non-reporting.

Overall, these three interrelated factors—limited sexual education, inadequate supervision, and the absence of formal policy frameworks—emerged consistently across the *pesantren* studied, shaping a vulnerable environment where preventive mechanisms remain weak and reactive measures unclear.

b. Building a child-friendly pesantren climate: six strategic dimensions

Field data from 15 *pesantren* show that the development of a child-friendly climate revolves around six interconnected dimensions: physical and psychological safety, written policy, inclusive pedagogy, staff training, student participation, and parental involvement. These six aspects emerged repeatedly from interviews, focus group discussions, and observations of daily activities in dormitories, classrooms, and prayer halls. A foundational step identified by almost all respondents involves ensuring both physical safety and psychological comfort for students. Administrators and teachers repeatedly emphasized that facilities and supervision routines shape children's sense of security. One administrator at *Pesantren* Al Wasathiyah stressed during an interview, *"The dormitory must be clean and well-maintained; if the restroom is dirty, the children will not want to come to the pesantren. A clean and safe environment is our first obligation"* (Interview with *Pesantren* Al Wasathiyah, 2024).

Students echoed this concern, linking their sense of safety directly to the presence of adult supervision. A *santri* from Darussaadah explained, *"I feel safer when there is a teacher on night duty; otherwise we worry about what might happen in the dorm. Knowing someone is there makes us more comfortable"* (Interview with *Santri*, Darussaadah, 2024). Alongside physical conditions, emotional support emerged as a critical theme shaping the *pesantren* climate. Teachers described their efforts to become approachable and responsive to

students' concerns. One teacher at Mama Bakry Sadeng stated, "*Children often tell the teacher if they have a problem. We strive to be good listeners and not judge them, because we know they are far from home*" (Interview with Teacher, Mama Bakry Sadeng, 2024). Students confirmed this dynamic. A *santri* from Al Badariyah shared, "*I feel calmer after talking with my teacher because she listens without judging. It helps me focus on my study and ibadah*" (Interview with *Santri*, Al Badariyah, 2024).

Written policies also function as visible institutional commitments and were observed to play an important symbolic role. Teachers reported that rules and guidance are posted in classrooms and mosques, signaling clear boundaries. As one teacher from Darul Amanah explained, "*We have written rules, which are posted in the classroom and the mosque, so everyone knows the boundaries and can refer to them anytime*" (Interview with *Pesantren* Darul Amanah, 2024). Yet students pointed out gaps in communication and understanding. A *santri* from Husnayain remarked, "*Sometimes we see posters, but we don't really understand what they mean or what we should do if something happens*" (Interview with *Santri*, Husnayain, 2024).

Pedagogical methods were also shown to influence the climate significantly. Teachers highlighted the importance of participatory approaches, noting that students become more confident when involved in discussions rather than merely memorizing texts. A teacher from Husnayain explained, "*When students are involved in discussions, they become more confident in asking questions. It also helps them learn about respect and boundaries in a positive way*" (Interview with Teacher, Husnayain, 2024). Students echoed this view. A *santri* from Al Inayah stated, "*It's easier to speak when the ustadz gives us stories first, not just memorization. We feel part of the lesson and can ask about things that confuse us*" (Interview with *Santri*, Al Inayah, 2024).

Another enabling factor repeatedly emphasized by respondents was staff training in child protection. Teachers and supervisors described how official training programs changed their attitudes and responses to sensitive issues. An ustadz from Al Badariyah reflected, "*We participated in a training on child protection provided by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, which improved our*

ability to handle cases. We learned not only the procedures but also how to speak to children" (Interview with *Pesantren* Al Badariyah, 2024). Students noticed and appreciated these changes. A *santri* from Al Washilah said, "*Now the ustadz explains calmly instead of shouting, and we feel more respected. We are not afraid to report problems anymore"* (Interview with *Santri*, Al Washilah, 2024).

Finally, parental involvement was consistently emphasized across all *pesantren*. Administrators described structured forums and monthly meetings with parents as mechanisms to strengthen collaboration. Students expressed appreciation for these efforts. A *santri* from La Royba shared, *"When my parents come to meetings, I feel that they care about my life here. It makes me feel safe and supported"* (Interview with *Santri*, La Royba, 2024).

Together, these six dimensions—from physical protection to participatory pedagogy and parental engagement—constitute a layered strategy for cultivating a child-friendly climate in *pesantren*. The interconnectedness of these dimensions is illustrated in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2. Six strategic dimensions in developing a child-friendly pesantren climate

The figure illustrates a sequential framework of six interrelated dimensions that collectively form a child-friendly *pesantren* climate. It begins with the creation of an inclusive physical and psychological environment, which is then reinforced by institutional policy commitment. This commitment

is translated into child-friendly learning implementation, supported by trained educators and staff. Active student participation follows as a key element of empowerment, and the process culminates in active parental engagement. Together these dimensions represent an integrated and layered strategy for safeguarding and nurturing students within the *pesantren* context.

c. Synthesizing the findings: an empirical strategic model

Based on thematic coding of data from interviews, FGDs, and observations across 15 *pesantren*, this study constructs a grounded model that articulates the pathway toward preventing sexual violence through the development of a child-friendly *pesantren* climate. The model consists of seven interconnected components that collectively reinforce institutional, pedagogical, and familial commitments. At the foundation lies institutional policy and regulation, which reflects the readiness of *pesantren* to uphold children's rights and provide clear procedures for handling sensitive cases. As one teacher from Al Inayah emphasized, *"If there is a student telling a story, the teacher must know how to respond so the child does not feel afraid"* (Interview with Ustadz, Al Inayah, 2024). Students also recognized the importance of clarity and accessibility of rules. A *santri* from Darussaadah explained, *"We know the rules are written, but sometimes we need the ustadz to explain them clearly"* (Interview with *Santri*, Darussaadah, 2024).

Moving upward, staff training ensures that teachers and dormitory supervisors can respond effectively to disclosures and handle cases appropriately. An ustadz from Al Badariyah stated, *"Training gave us the words and confidence to handle sensitive cases. Before, we were unsure how to approach such topics"* (Interview with *Pesantren* Al Badariyah, 2024). Students noticed and valued this change in adult behavior. A *santri* from La Royba said, *"Now when I report something, the ustadz listens carefully instead of dismissing it. We feel our voices matter"* (Interview with *Santri*, La Royba, 2024).

Between policy and practice lies the process of cultural mediation, where written codes are translated into lived norms and everyday behaviors. This mechanism emerged as a distinctive theme in the data. An ustadzah from

Al Umm Aswaja reflected, *"We teach manners not only through rules, but through daily example. Children copy what we do, not only what we say"* (Interview with *Pesantren* Al Umm Aswaja, 2024). A *santri* from Husnayain added, *"It feels safer when discipline is explained with patience, not anger. We learn to respect the rules when they are modeled calmly"* (Interview with *Santri*, Husnayain, 2024).

These three mechanisms—policy commitment, staff training, and cultural mediation—interact to generate a child-friendly climate, where students experience both physical and emotional safety. A *santri* from Mama Bakry Sadeng shared, *"Now I dare to tell the teacher when I am uncomfortable. Before, we were afraid"* (Interview with *Santri*, Mama Bakry Sadeng, 2024). This climate is then strengthened by the combined capacities of families and staff. Parents repeatedly described regular meetings as crucial, while students emphasized how parental engagement enhances their sense of protection. A *santri* from Al Washilah said, *"When my parents ask the teacher about our dorm, I feel they are protecting me"* (Interview with *Santri*, Al Washilah, 2024). Staff also recognized their evolving role. An ustadz from Husnayain stated, *"Being a dorm supervisor is like being a second parent; we must be sensitive to children's feelings and needs"* (Interview with Ustadz, Husnayain, 2024).

The synergy of these domains leads to what respondents termed an institutionalized partnership, where families and staff share responsibility for safeguarding. A parent from Darul Amanah explained, *"We can discuss problems openly with teachers, not just receive orders. It feels like cooperation"* (Interview with Parent, Darul Amanah, 2024). A *santri* from Al Badariyah confirmed, *"I see my parents and ustadz working together, and it makes me feel safer"* (Interview with *Santri*, Al Badariyah, 2024). Ultimately, this model culminates in the reduced risk of sexual violence, reflected in safer dormitory dynamics, increased child disclosure, and strengthened vigilance across the *pesantren* community. A *santri* from Darussaadah concluded, *"It's easier to speak up now; we are not afraid anymore"* (Interview with *Santri*, Darussaadah, 2024).

These seven interconnected components—spanning structural, cultural, and relational dimensions—together form the empirical strategic model that underpins this study. The configuration is presented in Figure 3 below.
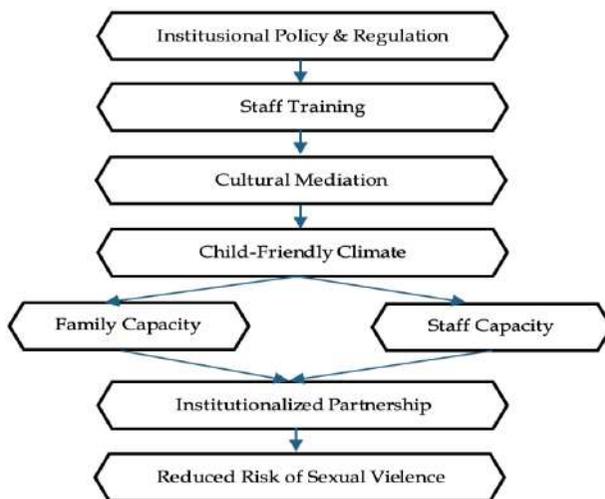
Figure 3. Empirical Strategic Model for Child-Friendly Pesantren Reform

This figure visualizes the seven interconnected components of the empirical model. It starts with institutional policy and regulation at the base, followed by staff training and cultural mediation as bridging mechanisms. These lead to the formation of a child-friendly climate, which is reinforced by family capacity and staff capacity, culminating in an institutionalized partnership that reduces the risk of sexual violence. Together, these components show how policy, practice, and relationships converge to create a sustainable safeguarding system within *pesantren*.

2. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that building a child-friendly *pesantren* climate to prevent sexual violence cannot be achieved by relying solely on written policies and staff training. The empirical evidence underscores that cultural mediation and the staff–family alliance function as crucial bridging mechanisms between formal structures and everyday practices. These findings enrich the literature on child protection in faith-based educational institutions, while also offering practical contributions to the strengthening of national policy frameworks such as the Child-Friendly Islamic Boarding School (CFIBS) (Idris et al., 2023; Hariadi et al., 2025).

One of the most distinctive contributions of this research is the identification of cultural mediation as the central axis in shaping a child-friendly *pesantren* climate. Cultural mediation here is not merely the transmission of religious or moral values; it is a translation mechanism that connects formal regulations with daily practice. Informal norms—such as how teachers discipline *santri*, how religious teachings are enacted in daily interactions, and how gender roles are performed—constitute a "hidden curriculum" that profoundly influences the *pesantren* safety climate. Field data show that this hidden curriculum, if left unexamined, can reinforce harmful hierarchies; yet when reoriented, it becomes a powerful protective resource. Several *pesantren* in this study deliberately reinterpreted values such as *ukhuwah* (brotherhood) and *tabligh* (responsible communication) to encourage open dialogue, peer support, and trust-based reporting. In this way, doctrine and empathy intersect to create a culturally embedded safeguard (Sutisna & Khori, 2024).

These findings are consistent with global scholarship. Fan (2024) demonstrates how hidden curricula shape perceptions of violence and social justice, particularly for marginalized groups. Monteiro Mota et al., (2022) emphasize that cultural change in schools must be participatory and dialogical in order to transform entrenched norms. Pappas (2023) likewise highlights that cultural mediation fosters a "climate of coexistence," where rules are not only enforced but internalized through everyday rituals and relationships. These perspectives align with the present study, showing that cultural mediation is not a peripheral process but the linchpin that animates formal child-protection policies with ethical and emotional relevance. By placing cultural mediation at the center of the empirical model, this research offers a more nuanced understanding of institutional reform in *pesantren*. Sustainable transformation cannot rely solely on written codes or staff training; it must also address the cultural substratum that determines how interventions are enacted, interpreted, and lived (Muafiah et al., 2022; Hakim & Abidin, 2024).

Another important contribution is the reconceptualization of the staff–family alliance in building institutional capacity within *pesantren*. Rather than viewing staff training and parental involvement as two parallel

domains, the empirical model reveals them as an interdependent relational system. In practice, *pesantren* staff are not only educators but also act as substitute parents; families, in turn, cannot remain passive observers (Sholeh et al., 2024; Dewi & Ansori, 2023). Both must form an alliance to sustain a safe and protective environment. Field data indicate that collaboration among teachers, dormitory supervisors, parents, and *santri* is realized through everyday routines. Teachers and dormitory supervisors assume dual roles as educators and secondary caregivers who are sensitive to students' emotional needs. Parents view structured forums and regular meetings as essential mechanisms for strengthening collaboration, while *santri* report an increased sense of safety when parental involvement aligns with the guidance provided by teachers (Husnaini et al., 2023; Haidar et al., 2023).

These local findings affirm the global literature. This relational framing is consistent with Stebick et al., (2023), who argue that psychological safety is the foundation for effective teacher–parent collaboration, particularly in diverse and fragile contexts. Sutherland et al., (2023) likewise emphasize that for vulnerable children, family–school partnerships are not optional but necessary to address behavioral and emotional risks. Sheridan and Garbacz (2022) further demonstrate that teachers who actively integrate family perspectives develop more responsive interventions. Taken together, these studies affirm that institutional capacity cannot be reduced to technical training; it must be co-constructed through ongoing dialogue, trust, and relational competence.

In this respect, the present findings challenge traditional views of capacity-building that often isolate staff development from parental engagement. The *pesantren* model examined here places an "alliance of care" at the forefront, wherein educators and families contribute complementary resources—knowledge, vigilance, and emotional support. This resonates with Weiner et al., (2021), who advocate dismantling hierarchical assumptions that position parents as passive or uninformed. By recognizing parents as knowledge holders, schools become more culturally responsive and better able to prevent violence. The novelty of this study lies in demonstrating that in faith-based boarding schools, the staff–family alliance is not a peripheral support but a

structural determinant of child protection. While global scholarship has long underscored the importance of family–school partnerships (Clark-Louque & Latunde, 2019), the present findings extend this conversation by situating such alliances in residential religious settings, where the everyday lives of *santri* are fully entrusted to institutional care. In such contexts, staff capacity becomes effective only when continuously synchronized with family capacity, producing what this study terms an institutionalized partnership.

A comparison between the initial conceptual framework and the empirically derived model reveals significant shifts in both structure and emphasis. The initial conceptual model anticipated three main domains—policy framework, staff training, and institutional supervision—based largely on prior literature on school climate and child protection. While these dimensions remain relevant, field data required the addition of two elements: cultural mediation as a bridging process, and the staff–family alliance as a relational determinant of institutional capacity. This adaptation illustrates how grounded qualitative inquiry often reshapes theoretical assumptions. Shaw et al., (2021) describe this process as a "best-fit framework," in which initial models serve as flexible templates that evolve through empirical engagement. In the present study, data from *pesantren* actors—teachers, *santri*, and parents—surfaced cultural and relational dynamics that had been under-theorized in the initial framework. The revised model therefore not only retains structural inputs such as regulation and training but also embeds affective and interactive layers that more accurately reflect the lived realities of *pesantren* life.

This transformation mirrors what Neill et al., (2023) call a "synthesizing moment" in thematic analysis, when descriptive categories crystallize into explanatory constructs. In this study, cultural mediation emerged as the explanatory bridge between policy and practice, while the staff–family alliance became central to sustaining preventive efforts. These elements were not anticipated in the early design but proved indispensable in explaining how protective climates are effectively institutionalized in *pesantren*. By situating these shifts within broader methodological discourse, this study highlights the importance of flexible, inductive frameworks for researching complex

educational environments. The comparison underscores that effective models of child protection cannot remain static or linear; they must adapt to the cultural and relational contexts in which they operate.

The findings also enrich the theoretical discourse on child-friendly school climates by emphasizing that institutional change is not only structural but also cultural and relational. Existing literature often situates policy and staff training as the principal determinants of safeguarding (Fry et al., 2018; Halliday et al., 2024); however, the empirical model developed here demonstrates that such measures are effective only when mediated through the cultural substratum of *pesantren*. The notion of cultural mediation reframes the hidden curriculum: rather than serving as a silent transmitter of hierarchical values, it can be mobilized to cultivate empathy, openness, and protective norms that safeguard children (Rohmadiyah et al., 2024). Similarly, the staff–family alliance advances current understandings of institutional capacity. Instead of viewing training and parental involvement as separate interventions, the findings show that safety is sustained when educators and families form an alliance of care built on trust and shared responsibility (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

The policy implications are significant. Institutionalizing a child-friendly *pesantren* climate requires a realignment of policy design toward inclusivity, child protection, and pedagogical humanism. *Pesantren* are increasingly adopting inclusive models that foreground non-discrimination, children's rights, and the integration of these values across curricula and religious activities (Maula et al., 2022; Burga & Damopolii, 2022; Sadiah, 2022). These shifts echo the broader aims of Islamic education, which seek to harmonize intellectual competence with moral discernment through a humanistic lens (Candrasari et al., 2023; Hasibuan et al., 2025). Consequently, regulations and standard operating procedures cannot remain mere compliance checklists; they must be embedded in the institution's moral and cultural fabric, ensuring that protective ethics inform both leadership practices and everyday pedagogy (Huda et al., 2025; Husaini Zuhri & Huda, 2024).

The practical implications are equally clear. Institutional practices ranging from supervision routines to infrastructural design should be revisited through the lens of child welfare. Research indicates that effective child-friendly policies involve not only curricular reform but also administrative routines and architectural adaptations that embody safety and inclusivity (Muafiah et al., 2022; Wasehudin et al., 2023; Maghfiroh et al., 2024). This includes accessible complaint mechanisms, spaces that accommodate children with special needs, and the cultivation of empathetic adult–child interactions at every level of the institution. In this way, safeguarding evolves into what might be called a "pedagogization of protection," where safety and emotional care are no longer procedural add-ons but pedagogical principles in their own right (Ma'arif et al., 2023).

The role of *pesantren* leaders—kiai, nyai, and senior teachers—remains pivotal in translating these aspirations into lived practice. Their symbolic authority extends beyond enforcement to cultural modeling, shaping how protective behaviors are interpreted, internalized, and sustained across generations. This finding points to the need for capacity-building programs that cultivate not only technical knowledge but also reflective and affective competencies among institutional actors (Misdah et al., 2025; Supriani et al., 2023). Pedagogy, in this sense, must be reimagined as both cognitive and relational, integrating Islamic values with contemporary insights into child development and safeguarding (Haidar et al., 2023; Hasibuan et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the emergence of CFIBS as a national framework represents a significant policy turning point. The push toward CFIBS reflects a societal demand to protect children from violence while ensuring holistic development in boarding-school contexts (Idris et al., 2023; Nurul Azizah et al., 2023). These efforts symbolize not only a transformation in governance but also an ongoing negotiation between religious orthodoxy and modern child-protection standards. In this mediating space, policy design must be participatory, involving educators, parents, and community stakeholders to ensure contextual legitimacy and adaptability (Jamaludin & Prayuti, 2022; Rokhman et al., 2023; Alwi & Mumtahana, 2023).

Although grounded in the Indonesian *pesantren* context, these findings resonate with broader safeguarding challenges in faith-based and residential schools worldwide. Similar dynamics have been observed in Catholic seminaries, Hindu Gurukul, and Christian boarding schools, where institutional authority and familial distance often create vulnerabilities. The emphasis on cultural mediation and relational partnerships offers a transferable framework that highlights how protection models must be culturally embedded as well as structurally enforced (Dewi & Ansori, 2023; Hasibuan et al., 2025). As UNICEF (2021) underscores, child-friendly initiatives succeed globally when rules are not only codified but also lived as shared commitments among institutions, families, and children themselves.

Accordingly, this study shows that preventing sexual violence in *pesantren* requires more than structural regulation and technical training. The empirical model developed here affirms that sustainable protection depends on two critical innovations: cultural mediation, which translates formal rules into everyday norms and practices, and the staff–family alliance, which reconceptualizes institutional capacity as a relational partnership rather than a bureaucratic function (Husnaini et al., 2023; Sholeh et al., 2024). Together, these elements create a child-friendly climate that protects santri not merely through compliance but through trust, empathy, and shared responsibility. Theoretically, this research advances the discourse on child protection in faith-based educational settings by repositioning the hidden curriculum as a vehicle for protection and by situating family engagement as an integral part of institutional competence (Huda et al., 2025). These findings enrich global debates on school climate and fill a research gap concerning *pesantren*, which remain underrepresented in international literature. In policy and practice, the results affirm the need for regulations that are culturally resonant, participatory, and embedded in everyday pedagogical routines.

Despite the substantial theoretical and practical contributions of this study to the development of a child-friendly *pesantren* model, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the research employs a qualitative approach focused on 15 *pesantren* across three provinces; thus, the findings are

contextual and cannot be generalized to all *pesantren* in Indonesia. Second, although triangulation was conducted through in-depth interviews, FGDs, and non-participatory observations, the data still rely on participants' perceptions and experiences, which may be influenced by social desirability bias or constraints in disclosing sensitive issues such as sexual violence. Third, this study has not tested the effectiveness of the proposed model through longitudinal evaluation or quantitative approaches; therefore, the long-term impacts of implementing the model require systematic examination in future research. These limitations open avenues for subsequent studies to broaden the study sites, adopt mixed-methods designs, and assess the sustainability of model implementation across diverse *pesantren* contexts and other faith-based residential educational institutions.

D. Conclusion

This study synthesizes the findings by showing that creating a child-friendly *pesantren* climate to prevent sexual violence hinges on more than formal regulations and staff training. The empirical evidence demonstrates how cultural mediation and the staff–family alliance jointly translate policy into lived practice, ensuring that safeguarding efforts are not only codified but internalized as everyday norms. By integrating structural, cultural, and relational dimensions, the study provides a comprehensive answer to the research question of how *pesantren* can institutionalize child protection within their unique educational and religious contexts.

The research makes two core contributions. Theoretically, it advances the discourse on child protection in faith-based boarding schools by reframing the hidden curriculum as a vehicle for safeguarding and positioning family involvement as an integral element of institutional competence. This novelty extends global debates on school climate and addresses the underrepresentation of Islamic boarding schools in international literature. Practically, the study offers a transferable model that guides policy makers, school leaders, and practitioners in designing regulations and routines that are culturally resonant, participatory, and embedded in daily pedagogy. It reinforces that initiatives

such as the Child-Friendly Islamic Boarding School (CFIBS) framework will succeed only when leaders, teachers, and families embody its principles in their day-to-day interactions.

Building on the limitations acknowledged in the discussion, future research should test the model's effectiveness across a broader range of *pesantren* and other faith-based residential schools, employ longitudinal or mixed-methods approaches to examine long-term outcomes, and explore additional variables such as gender dynamics or the role of community stakeholders. Such studies will help refine and validate the model, ensuring its adaptability and sustainability in diverse cultural and institutional contexts.

Safeguarding in *pesantren* cannot be reduced to compliance with formal rules but must be enacted as a shared moral and relational commitment. By demonstrating how cultural mediation and the staff–family alliance can transform institutional capacity, this research contributes a novel and internationally relevant framework for reimagining educational excellence as a holistic commitment to protection, inclusion, and moral citizenship.

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Bibliography

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