

Religious Manipulation in Child Sexual Harassment: Islamic Boarding Schools in Indonesia

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Abstract: *Child sexual abuse in Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia remains a pressing issue that is often overlooked within educational institutions. This study investigates the manipulation of religious doctrine in cases of child sexual harassment within these environments, aiming to understand how perpetrators exploit religious principles. The research uses a descriptive qualitative approach and analyzes online media coverage to explore those involved' characteristics, methods, and motives. The findings reveal that perpetrators employ three primary strategies to manipulate religion: redefining religious doctrines, reconstructing religious practices, and repositioning religious authority. These tactics are employed to legitimize and normalize sexual harassment of children in Islamic boarding schools. This study recommends conducting in-depth interviews with perpetrators and victims to gain a deeper and more empirical understanding. Additionally, the study provides recommendations for developing policies and practices to prevent religious manipulation and safeguard children's rights within Islamic boarding schools. This study emphasizes the urgent need for effective measures to protect vulnerable children in these educational settings.*

Introduction

The manipulation of religion is a mode that perpetrators of sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools commonly employ. In the last two years, child of sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools has reached 207, increasing by 19% yearly (KPAI, 2021; Komnas Perempuan, 2023). This context, in the view of Fernando, Larasati, et al. (2023), occurs because their social structure often manipulates the children's subordinate position in their social environment; therefore, they are very vulnerable in becoming victims of social deviance due to the social disposition they experience. In many instances, manipulative interpretations of religious values are used to legitimize and normalize such actions, further complicating efforts to uncover and mitigate these abuses within educational settings (Abdullah et al., 2023; Ismail et al., 2023). Therefore, the discussion regarding the manipulation of religion in cases child of sexual harassment is essential for understanding and addressing the characteristics of these abuses in Islamic boarding schools.

Islamic boarding schools have developed in Indonesia as educational institutions based on religious values (Akmaliyah et al., 2021; Anggadwita et al., 2021). These institutions provide structured interactions and routine learning methods that embody norms and practices aligned with religious teachings (Fernando et al., 2024; Masnawati et al., 2019). Islamic boarding schools are categorized as religious, educational institutions that operate under a religion-based system led by *kiai* (Islamic scholars), *ustadz* (male Islamic teachers), and *ustadzah* (female Islamic teachers) as supervisors, offering educational programs at the elementary schools, junior high schools, and high schools levels (Hakim et al., 2024). Even though they are religious-based, Islamic boarding schools can also adapt to implementing a modern education system that integrates religious and non-religious subjects into a curriculum aligning with national education (Airlangga PH et al., 2024). Therefore, an Islamic boarding school is an educational institution that focuses on moral and mental education based on religious and social values prevailing in the communal society (Zarkasyi, 2020).

A study on the relationship between students and the leaders of Islamic boarding schools highlights the strong bond that forms between the students (*santri*) and the *kiai* (Islamic scholars), *ustadz*, and *ustadzah*, which is based on respect, guidance, and trust (Hasbiyallah & Ihsan, 2021; Mariah et al., 2023). This relationship is often characterized by close mentorship, where the leaders provide not only academic and religious instruction but also serve as moral guides and role models for the students. *Kiai* and teachers play a crucial role in shaping students' character and instilling religious values through their personal examples and daily interactions (Nur et al., 2023). The hierarchical structure within the boarding school fosters discipline and mutual respect, strengthening the students' commitment to religious and social norms (Rahmatullah et al., 2021). Moreover, the dynamic between the students and their leaders contributes to their spiritual and emotional development, preparing them to be future community leaders (Alwi et al., 2023). The influence of these leaders extends beyond the classroom, as they often maintain a lifelong relationship with their students, reinforcing the communal and spiritual bonds cultivated within the Islamic boarding school environment.

Child sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools encompasses complex characteristics, as exemplified by a case in Bandung where a teacher, identified as HW, raped 12 female students, resulting in pregnancies and births among some victims. HW's predatory behavior spanned five years, from 2016 to 2021 (detik. news, 2021). This horrific incident drew the attention of state institutions such as the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI), which became actively involved in addressing the case. However, so far, studies discussing the characteristics of sexual harassment only focus on three contexts. First, studies focus on discussing the characteristics of sexual harassment in the context of its implications for victims (Scoglio et al., 2021; Winters et al., 2020; Ferrara et al., 2019). Second, studies focus on the characteristics of sexual harassment in the context of the forms of harassment (Bondestam & Lundqvist, 2020; Vera-Gray & Kelly, 202; Nurhakim, 2023). Third, studies focus on discussing the characteristics of sexual harassment in the context of enforcement (Christensen et al., 2021; Winters, Colombino et al.,

2020; Simon et al., 2020). In general, studies that discuss child sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools characteristics only focus on three contexts, namely, implications, forms, and law enforcement processes. Therefore, the explanation regarding child sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools has not been conducted comprehensively.

Sexual harassment is often experienced by vulnerable individuals, minority groups, and those without authority (Detik News, 2023)ty in their social environment (Espino et al., 2022). Bergenfeld et al. (2022) highlight that underage females are particularly at risk of experiencing sexual harassment under certain circumstances. Therefore, Sakellari et al. (2022) said underage female individuals are the most vulnerable group to experience sexual harassment in their social environment verbally and non-verbally. This context is also emphasized by Jennings et al. (2022), who state that sexual harassment has occurred massively in the community. However, the most worrying is the sexual harassment of child, which does not occur in formal and informal educational institutions. The potential for children to become victims of sexual abuse, as suggested by Fernando, Larasati, et al. (2023), occurs due to children being individuals who are frequently objectified within their social structure. Therefore, their attitudes and behavior can be affected by their social environment, even if it is contrary to the interests and welfare of children.

Child of sexual harassment victims in Islamic boarding schools have been shown through the characteristics of a latent and complex mode (Fernando et al., 2023). This context also aligns with what Gewirtz-Meydan and Finkelhor (2020) said: the characteristics of child sexual harassment cases are crucial to explain and reflect on the modes and motives underlying the massive child sexual harassment in educational institutions. However, comprehensive studies addressing the characteristics of child sexual harassment in educational settings are lacking, particularly those that explore how religious doctrines, practices, and authorities are manipulated in Islamic boarding schools (Montasir et al., 2023). Considering the absence of a discussion on the manipulation of religion in acts child of sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools, this study, in addition to responding to the shortcomings of the studies that have been conducted, also explains the doctrines, practices, and religious authorities that are not infrequently used in legitimizing and normalizing acts child of sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools.

The manipulation of religion is often associated with elite propaganda used to influence the knowledge and meaning of religious holders regarding religious doctrines and practices into anomy (Muassomah, 2023). Manipulation carried out by certain elites in a religious community is not least based on a control in engineering religious values to legitimize or normalize a practice contrary to religion's essence and morality (Parker, 2013; Ben-Nun Bloom et al., 2015; Salleh et al., 2024). Moreover, this manipulation can foster information exclusivity, resulting in a distortion of the meaning of religious teachings, inciting conflict, and even intervening in the determination of certain actions (Rosler et al., 2021). Therefore, religious holders believe that manipulating religion can alter emotions, knowledge, and actions under the schemes that have been internalized by certain elites (Łysiuk, 2020;

Muassomah, 2023; Fernando, Galuh Larasati, & Cahyani, 2023). This context by Marwick and Lewis (2017) is a form of manipulating religion.

Explores Perpetrators of child sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools often use the mode of religious manipulation. Thus, it is essential to explore and reflect on the characteristics of sexual harassment in these institutions that utilize manipulative religious doctrines, practices, and authorities. This study focuses on three questions. First, how is religious doctrine manipulated in acts of child sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools? Second, how is the manipulation of religious practices carried out in the act child of sexual harassment in an Islamic boarding school? Third, how is the manipulation of religious authority carried out in acts child of sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools? In line with these questions, this study is also based on the argument that the manipulation of religion is a mode that is not least used in acts child of sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools. Redefinition of doctrines, reconstruction of practices, and repositioning of religious authorities are often conducted to legitimize and normalize acts related to child sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools.

Method

This study was conducted in widespread news coverage child of sexual harassment cases in Islamic boarding schools. Fernando, Larasati, et al. (2023) also said that the child of sexual harassment is a critical phenomenon to explain in the context of its modes and motives. However, this research specifically focuses on analyzing the modes and motives of sexual harassment against girls under 18 who are victims in Islamic boarding schools, utilizing online media coverage accessed through Google. In line with that, this study is also based on three considerations. First, the phenomenon of child sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools is a central issue that has not been comprehensively addressed in previous studies. Second, the mode of child sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools contains contextual characteristics that are very important to explain. Third, child sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools also has complex motives and is critical to reflect on.

This study employs a descriptive and qualitative approach (Hidayat, 2024). The data are derived from text excerpts obtained through a review of 1,000 online news articles using the search keyword "cases of sexual harassment that occurred in Islamic boarding schools" via the Google search engine. In order to ensure the validity of the research methodology, the data obtained from online media sources need to be triangulated with other credible sources, such as official statements from government agencies, police reports, and investigations conducted by institutions like the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI). Triangulating data with these authoritative sources allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, as it integrates perspectives from both journalistic accounts and formal investigations. Statements from law enforcement officials handling these cases can provide insights into the legal processes. At the same time, KPAI's involvement highlights the protective measures and support extended to the victims. This cross-referencing of data with official sources not only enhances

the reliability of the study but also ensures a more balanced and in-depth analysis of the modes and motives of child sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools.

The data searching and reading process was conducted following the methods established by Fernando et al. (2023), with skimming and intensive techniques. Three authors rapidly conducted skimming reading, focusing on news titles disseminated via Google from July 15th to September 2nd, 2024. The skimming resulted in three general themes, namely, 317 news articles that discussed the characteristics regarding child of sexual harassment cases in Islamic boarding schools, 396 news articles that discussed the mode related to child of sexual harassment cases in Islamic boarding schools, 287 news articles that discussed the motive regarding child of sexual harassment cases in Islamic boarding schools. The three themes were later on read intensively to comprehend and explore detailed information concerning the characteristics of cases, modes, and motives of child sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools.

Data analysis in this study refers to the stages carried out by Galuh Larasati et al. (2023), which focused on three stages. First, data reduction is the stage of rearranging data into a more systematic form based on the classification of the data obtained according to the case characteristics, mode, and motive regarding child of sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools. Second, data verification is summarizing the data that has been reduced thematically. Third, data description is the stage of displaying data in a table containing quotes from online news texts that have been verified according to the relevance of the discussion in this study. These three processes analyze the data inductively as a basis for interpreting the acquired data. The data is interpreted by restating and reflecting them following the characteristics, patterns, and ideas described in the online news texts. This structured approach to data analysis allows for the derivation of conclusions regarding the characteristics and modes of child sexual harassment cases in Islamic boarding schools.

Results and Discussion

Understanding the manipulation of religion in cases of child sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools is crucial for comprehensively addressing this phenomenon. In many cases, religious manipulation occurs when perpetrators use religious teachings or their position of religious authority to blur the line between right and wrong, making the acts of sexual harassment appear legitimate or acceptable. This manipulation often involves the redefinition of religious doctrines, the reconstruction of religious practices, and the strengthening of religious leaders' authority to legitimize these actions.

The findings presented in the discussion reveal how this manipulation is systematically carried out and its impact on the mindset and perceptions of the victims and the community surrounding the boarding school. To enhance the effectiveness of the discussion and conclusion sections, it is essential to connect all arguments to the core objective of this research: critically understanding how religion is exploited to justify child sexual harassment. In doing so, the conclusion can provide a clear understanding of strategic steps to

prevent religious manipulation and strengthen child protection in Islamic boarding schools.

Redefinition of Religious Doctrine in Acts Related to Child Sexual Harassment

Perpetrators often engage in the redefinition of religious doctrine to justify acts of child sexual harassment within Islamic boarding schools. Tyagi & Sen (2020) also said that acts related to child sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools are not based on deviations from religious doctrines that the perpetrators use in legitimizing each of their actions. This context can be seen through cases of sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Redefinition of religious doctrine in acts related to child sexual harassment.

| Doctrines | Cases |
|-------------------------|--|
| Attain heaven | “Two leaders of an Islamic boarding school in East Lombok Regency were arrested for allegedly sexually abusing 41 female students. Ironically, these leaders abused the female students until they were raped with the modus of "sex recitation" and promising to attain heaven.” (Suryarandika, 2023). |
| Obedient to the teacher | “One of the victims of sexual harassment was interrogated by her parents. Initially, the victim did not admit to being pregnant since she was afraid. However, after being pressured, the victim finally told the truth that her Islamic boarding school teacher had impregnated her. This situation highlights the indoctrination the victim experienced, which prioritized obedience to her teacher over her allegiance to her parents.” (Assifa, 2021). |
| Torment | “Should the victims express a reluctance for sexual activities, they are coerced and intimidated with threats of torment, loss of memorization, and deprivation of blessed knowledge. The victims are also more afraid if the perpetrator employs scriptural verses and <i>hadith</i> during the act of harassment.” (Kompasiana, 2021). |
| Trusting the teacher | “Obeying the teacher is a teaching that students must obey. This modus often targets new Islamic boarding school students and those with minimal knowledge. The sexual harassment occurs since the victim must place complete trust in their teacher.” (Fury, 2022). |

| | |
|--|--|
| Attaining <i>karomah</i> (Blessing) | “The post-mortem results showed that 14 of the victims were minors. In the modus of sexual harassment, the victims were woken up early in the morning and invited to study in the canteen. The victims followed the teachings of the perpetrator since they were attracted to attain <i>karomah</i> (blessing) from the perpetrator.” (Setiawan, 2023). |
|--|--|

Source: Online news uploaded via Google.

Table 1 shows cases of sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools with the mode of redefining religious doctrines. Additionally, it outlines three critical contexts related to this redefinition in the cases of sexual harassment occurring within these institutions.

First, promising to attain heaven is a form of redefinition of religious doctrine that is not least used by perpetrators in legitimizing acts related to sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools. Many of them use this modus operandi. As can be seen through Suryarandika's (2023) report, which describes how two unscrupulous leaders of an Islamic boarding school in East Lombok sexually abused their female students by promising them entry into heaven.

Second, the fear of being tormented is a form of redefinition of religious doctrine that is not least used by perpetrators in legitimizing acts related to child sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools. This modus operandi is illustrated in a report by Kompasiana (2021), which reveals that perpetrators threaten their victims with torment if they refuse to engage in sexual acts with them.

Third, a student must obey the teacher is one form of redefinition of religious doctrine that is not least used by perpetrators in legitimizing child of sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools. Many of them use this modus operandi. Many exploit this belief as a means of control. For instance, Fury (2022) reported that a perpetrator in an Islamic boarding school justified their actions by instilling the idea that victims must obey and comply with all orders given by their teachers.

The redefinition of religious doctrine is not least used by perpetrators in legitimizing acts related to child sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools. The matter can be reflected through three critical contexts that can be seen through the display of Table 1. Doctrines such as promising to attain heaven, fearing that they will be tormented, and a student must obey the teacher are not a few redefinitions by perpetrators of sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools. These instances of redefining religious doctrine highlight how religious manipulation is used to justify acts of child sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools.

Reconstruction of Religious Practice in Child of Sexual Harassment

The reconstruction of religious practices is commonly utilized by perpetrators of sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools. Nathali et al. (2023) also said that in cases child of sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools, not a few were based on deviations in religious practices that the

perpetrators used in normalizing each of their actions. This context can be seen through cases of sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools displayed in Table 2.

Table 2. Reconstruction of religious practice in the child of sexual harassment.

| Practical | Cases |
|--|---|
| The practice of <i>ruqiyah</i> | “The Bengkulu Criminal Investigation Chief explained that SI was aware that her future husband often committed sexual harassment against his female students. On multiple occasions, SI witnessed the perpetrator's modus operandi, which involved practicing ruqiyah on the victim.” (Dwirawan, 2021). |
| The practice of medical treatment | “KH (36) was accused of molesting 26 female students. His modus operandi was pretending to provide treatment for female students experiencing pain through <i>ruqyah</i> . Currently, KH (36), the leader of the Islamic boarding school who allegedly committed sexual harassment against his female students, is detained by the West Nusa Tenggara Police.” (Febrianti, 2023). |
| The practice of <i>ijab qabul</i> (marriage process) | “WMA (57) sexually assaulted 14 of his underage students. The suspect's modus operandi was pretending to teach the practice of <i>ijab kabul</i> as if it were a <i>siri</i> marriage. After the consent, the suspect invites the victim to have sexual activities since he will attain a <i>karomah</i> or <i>blessing</i> of the offspring.” (Nong, 2023) |
| The practice of pray | “NK (55), a Quranic teacher in East Java, sexually harassed his students. More than once <i>Santriwati</i> was the victim of NK's sexual harassment. The mode used was to pretend to teach the practice of prayer. When teaching the prayer movements, he touches the sensitive parts of the victim's body.” (Nong, 2023). |
| The practice of pursuing knowledge | “The Cianjur Resort Police are investigating a case of accused sexual harassment committed by the founder of a foundation in Tokokak Subdistrict, West Java, against five underage female students. The accused sexual abuse was carried out using the excuse of transferring knowledge from teacher to student.” (Raharjo, 2023). |

Source: Online news uploaded via Google.

Table 2 shows cases of sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools with the mode of reconstructing religious practices. Additionally, it outlines three critical contexts concerning the reconstruction of these religious practices in relation to cases of child sexual harassment within Islamic boarding schools.

First, conducting treatment processes, such as *ruqyah*, is a religious practice employed by perpetrators to normalize acts related to child sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools. Many of them use this *modus operandi*. As seen through Dwirawan's report (2021), in sexually abusing his female student, SI, as the perpetrator, was pretending to treat the victim with *ruqiyah* practices yet committed sexual harassment.

Second, teaching worship practices such as prayer is one form of religious practice not least used by perpetrators in normalizing child of sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools. Many of them use this *modus operandi*. As can be seen through Nong's report (2023), NK (55), a reciting Koran teacher in East Java, committed acts related to a child of sexual harassment by pretending to teach prayer movements, yet NK (55) touched the sensitive parts of his student's body.

Third, carrying out the process of transferring knowledge is a form of religious practice that is not least used by perpetrators in normalizing acts related to child sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools. Many of them use this *modus operandi*. As can be seen through Raharjo's report (2023), the sexual harassment committed by the founder of an Islamic boarding school in West Java against five of his students was using the accuse of carrying out the practice of transferring knowledge from teacher to student.

The reconstruction of religious practices is not infrequently carried out by perpetrators in normalizing child sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools. Practices such as *ruqyah* treatment, prayer practices, and transferring knowledge from teachers to students are often reconstructed by perpetrators of sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools (Hakim, 2024). This reconstruction of religious practices represents a form of religious manipulation that perpetrators utilize to legitimize acts of sexual harassment against children within Islamic boarding schools.

Repositioning Religious Authority in Acts Child of Sexual Harassment

Perpetrators not least utilize the repositioning of religious authority to intervene with victims in cases regarding child sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools. Nurasih et al. (2023) also mentioned that cases of sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools are often linked to the abuse of religious authority by the perpetrators intervening with their victims. This context is illustrated by the cases of sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Repositioning religious authority in acts child of sexual harassment.

| The Authority | Cases |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Owner of the Islamic boarding school | "Many female students in Banyuwangi were victims of sexual activities by the owner of an Islamic boarding school, initials AF. The |

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|---|--|
| | perpetrator has had sexual activities with the victim at the Islamic boarding school three times. In his action, the perpetrator threatened to dismiss the victim from school if she refused to have sexual intercourse.” (Sutriyanto, 2022 to the abuse2). |
| Teacher at the Islamic boarding school | “A teacher at an Islamic boarding school in Serang City, identified by the initials MR (49), was arrested by the police for sexually harassing multiple students. In committing acts of sexual harassment, the perpetrator threatened the victims, stating that he would neglect and refrain from instructing them in learning to read the holy book at the Islamic boarding school.” (CNN Indonesia, 2022). |
| Leader of the Islamic boarding school | “13 female students became victims of sexual harassment committed by the head of an Islamic boarding school in West Java. The modus operandi was to persuade female students who had been harassed with a waiver of Islamic boarding school fees.” (Amindoni, 2023). |
| Caregivers at the Islamic boarding school | “NA (41) was arrested for sexually harassing five of his students. The modus operandi was to deceive the victim into obeying her caregiver to receive rewards and to discourage resistance due to the perpetrator's status as the victim's caregiver in learning to read the holy book.” (Oky, 2023). |
| Teacher at the Islamic boarding school | “The police arrested Wildan Masyuri (57) for harassing and molesting his students. In carrying out his actions, the perpetrator persuades the victim by utilizing his status as the victim's teacher. If you have sexual activities with your teacher, you will attain <i>karomah</i> (blessing).” (Detik News, 2023). |

Source. Online news uploaded via Google.

Table 3 shows cases of sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools with the perpetrators' mode of repositioning religious authority in intervening with their victims. Additionally, Table 3 outlines three critical contexts related to the abuse of religious authority in instances of sexual harassment within these institutions.

First, utilizing the position of the perpetrator as the owner of the Islamic boarding school is a form of repositioning authority that the perpetrator not least utilizes to intervene with victims in cases regarding child sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools. Many of them use this modus operandi, as can be seen through Sutriyanto's reports (2022), where an Islamic boarding school owner sexually harassed many female students. In carrying

out his actions, the perpetrator threatened to dismiss the victim from the Islamic boarding school if she refused to have sexual intercourse with him.

Second, utilizing the perpetrator's position as an Islamic boarding school administrator is a form of repositioning authority that the perpetrator utilizes to intervene with victims in cases regarding child sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools. Many of them use this *modus operandi*. As can be seen through Amindoni's report (2023), a boarding school administrator sexually abused 13 female students. In carrying out his actions, the perpetrator, as the Islamic boarding school administrator, persuades the victim to give her a scholarship if she has sexual relations with the perpetrator.

Third, utilizing the perpetrator's position as an Islamic boarding school caregiver is a form of repositioning authority that the perpetrator utilizes to intervene with victims in cases regarding child sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools. Many of them use this *modus operandi*, as seen in Oky's report (2023). NA (41) sexually harassed five female students; in carrying out his actions, the perpetrator, as the victim's teacher, threatened to abstain from teaching the victim to read the holy book if she refused sexual activities with him.

Perpetrators utilize the repositioning of religious authority to intervene with their victims in cases of sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools. This context can be reflected through three critical contexts that can be seen through the display of Table 3. The perpetrator's position as the owner, administrator, and caregiver of the Islamic boarding school is not a little repositioned by the perpetrator's child of sexual harassment in the Islamic boarding schools. Furthermore, this manipulation reflects a form of religious abuse that perpetrators—often targeting minors—utilize to exert control over their victims.

Islamic Legal Perspective on the Reconstruction of Religious Practices

The study of Islamic law provides a crucial perspective on the reconstruction of religious practices in cases of sexual harassment within Islamic boarding schools. According to Islamic jurisprudence, acts of sexual harassment and abuse are unequivocally condemned, with strict guidelines established to protect individuals, particularly minors, from harm (Ismail et al., 2023). The manipulation of religious practices such as *ruqyah*, *ijab qabul*, and prayer movements by perpetrators, as outlined in the cases discussed, represents a profound misinterpretation and abuse of religious teachings (Harahap et al., 2023). Islamic legal scholars emphasize that such deviations from the true spirit of Islamic practice undermine the ethical and moral foundations of the faith. Islamic legal scholars emphasize that such deviations from the true spirit of Islamic practice undermine the ethical and moral foundations of the faith. In response to these abuses, Islamic legal frameworks advocate for rigorous enforcement of protective measures and accountability mechanisms to prevent the exploitation of religious practices for harmful purposes (Suryani et al., 2023). This perspective underscores the need for ongoing reform and education within Islamic institutions to ensure that religious practices are upheld with integrity and that perpetrators are held accountable under Islamic law (Abdullah et al., 2023; Hakim et al., 2024).

Making Sense of Religious Manipulation in Child Sexual Harassment

The manipulation of religion in cases of sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools can be seen through three critical findings in this study. First, the redefinition of religious doctrines is conducted to legitimize acts related to child sexual harassment in these schools. Second, a reconstruction of religious practices has been carried out to normalize such acts. Third, religious authority is repositioned to intervene with victims in cases regarding child sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools. From these three findings, it can be reflected that the manipulation of religion is a mode that is rarely used in acts related to child sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools. Redefinition of doctrine, reconstruction of practice, and repositioning of religious authority are not least carried out to legitimize and normalize acts of sexual abuse against children in Islamic boarding schools (Santoso et al., 2023). Therefore, sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools is a structured and massive practice since it utilizes manipulative religious values and teachings that are difficult to identify or prevent.

This study reflects that the manipulation of religion in cases of sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools positions religion as an entity that is very vulnerable to being reproduced to achieve goals beyond the essence of religious values. This context is also emphasized by Nielsen (2015), that the manipulation of religion is often linked to elite propaganda that is used to influence the knowledge and meaning of religious individuals regarding religious doctrines and practices, leading to anomy, as with the manipulation of religion carried out by perpetrators of the child of sexual harassment in Islamic boarding school. While sexual harassment is recognized as deviant behavior that contradicts moral and religious values (Abbasi et al., 2022; Larasati & Abdullah, 2023), the acts of these perpetrators can be legitimized and normalized by distorting the essence of religious teachings (Montasir et al., 2023; Munjiah, 2023). The manipulation of religion in cases of child sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools also reflects the dominance in internalizing religious values. Henceforth, religious doctrines and practices taught in Islamic boarding schools are interpreted as absolute truths.

The manipulation of religion in cases regarding child sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools highlights the importance of comprehensive knowledge from individuals and groups in the process of internalizing religious values in order to detect the potential latent danger of sexual abuse in Islamic boarding schools. Islamic boarding schools, as religious educational institutions, have functions and responsibilities in realizing a religious society through a pedagogical process based on religious and human values (Ma'Arif, 2018; Widari et al., 2023). This context is also emphasized by Abu-Nimer dan Nasser (2017), that Islamic boarding schools, functioning as educational institutions, have the capacity to fortify not only strengthen religious values but also strengthen human values in the midst of changing socio-cultural conditions (Diana et al., 2021; Suud & Chaer, 2022). However, the establishment of a religious society can only occur if the internalization of religious values through the pedagogical process in Islamic boarding schools is not dominative and hierarchical in order to detect the latent danger of the

manipulation of religion in legitimizing and normalizing child of sexual harassment in Islamic boarding school at an early stage.

The findings in this study differ from previous studies. Studies that have discussed child of sexual harassment only focus on three contexts, namely, the implications of sexual harassment (Scoglio et al., 2021), forms of sexual harassment (Bondestam & Lundqvist, 2020), and the law enforcement process in sexual harassment cases (Christensen et al., 2021). In contrast, this study highlights a crucial context concerning the characteristics of the modus operandi related to child sexual harassment, specifically the manipulation of religious values and teachings to legitimize and normalize such behavior in Islamic boarding schools. This context occurs since internalizing religious values is dominant. As a result, religious doctrines and practices taught in Islamic boarding schools are interpreted as absolute truth. In line with that, Halliru (2012) also asserted that religion is often manipulated to legitimize and normalize an action in a religious community. This context underlies the massive manipulation of religion in cases of sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools.

The manipulation of religion in cases regarding child of sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools is a phenomenon that has complex and contextual mode characteristics. Reflection and evaluation of the internalization of religious values in the pedagogical process in formal and informal educational institutions is a crucial context to be carried out in order to detect the potential or even prevent acts related to child sexual harassment in the future. Fernando, Larasati, et al. (2023) also mentioned that reflection and evaluation of the internalization of religious values in the pedagogical process in educational institutions is critical to realizing a religious society in the future. In other words, if formal and informal educational institutions do not evaluate pedagogy, the potential for manipulating religious values will massively legitimize and normalize other social deviations in the future. Therefore, in addition to evaluating the pedagogical system, ideological reflection is crucial in detecting and preventing religious manipulation in Islamic boarding schools.

Conclusion

This study shows that the manipulation of religion is a prevalent occurrence in cases regarding child sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools. This context can be reflected through three critical findings. First, the manipulation of religion in cases of sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools is often conducted by redefining religious doctrines. Second, the manipulation of religion in cases of sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools is not least conducted by reconstructing religious practices. Third, the manipulation of religion in cases of sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools is not least conducted by repositioning religious authority. From these three findings, it can be concluded that the manipulation of religion is conducted to legitimize and normalize acts related to child sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools.

The findings of this study differ from those of previous research on child sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools, which typically focus on the forms of abuse and the law enforcement process. The data reveal complex and

contextual characteristics of the modes of abuse present in these institutions. The findings in this study are expected to initiate new dialogues in religious criminology and sociology studies in explaining the modes and motives behind child sexual harassment in the educational environment. In addition, the findings in this study can also be used as the basis for evaluating the pedagogical system in formal and informal institutions to detect early or even prevent the potential latent danger related to child sexual harassment in the educational environment.

This study also exhibits limitations in the data collection process. Data collection in this study was only carried out by collecting and reading online news distributed via Google using the search keyword "Cases of sexual harassment that occurred in Islamic boarding schools." Therefore, the data was acquired and presented solely from excerpts from the online news texts. However, the weaknesses in this study are expected to be responded to by future studies, particularly for studies seeking to explain the phenomenon of sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools through in-depth interviews with both perpetrators and victims. This process aims to foster a new, more comprehensive, and empirical understanding of the modes and motives of sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools.

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