

**Sexual Violence in Islamic Boarding Schools  
As A Social and Educational Problem:  
Analysis Of Violence Based on Galtung's Perspective**

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**Abstrak**

*Kekerasan seksual di pesantren kerap dipahami sebagai penyimpangan perilaku individu, sehingga penanganannya lebih berfokus pada pelaku semata. Studi ini bertujuan menganalisis kekerasan seksual di pesantren sebagai fenomena sistemik yang diproduksi oleh interaksi antara kekerasan langsung, kekerasan struktural, dan kekerasan kultural dalam perspektif teori kekerasan Johan Galtung. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus di pesantren di Jawa Barat. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan pelaku, pengelola pesantren, aparat Kementerian Agama daerah, serta aktivis perempuan, disertai observasi terbatas dan analisis dokumen putusan pengadilan. Analisis data dilakukan secara tematik dengan mengaitkan temuan empiris pada kerangka kekerasan langsung, struktural, dan kultural. Selain itu, ditambahkan juga analisis tentang pencegahan kekerasan seksual di pesantren. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kekerasan seksual di pesantren tidak hanya berupa pelecehan dan eksploitasi seksual oleh figur otoritas (kekerasan langsung), tetapi juga dimungkinkan oleh struktur pesantren yang hierarkis, tertutup, dan minim pengawasan (kekerasan struktural), serta dilegitimasi oleh nilai budaya patriarkal, stigma korban, tafsir agama yang bias gender, dan budaya hormat berlebihan kepada kyai (kekerasan kultural). Pencegahan kekerasan seksual di pesantren memerlukan penguatan pengawasan institusional, perlindungan santri, dan transformasi budaya. Studi ini menegaskan relevansi teori Galtung dalam kajian kekerasan di lembaga pendidikan berbasis agama dan merekomendasikan pendekatan pencegahan multidimensional.*

**Kata kunci:** Kekerasan Seksual, Kekerasan Struktural, Kekerasan Kultural, Pesantren, Relasi Kuasa

**Abstract**

Sexual violence in Islamic boarding schools is often viewed as an individual behavioural deviation, and responses to this problem tend to focus solely on the perpetrator. This study aims to examine sexual violence in Islamic Boarding Schools as a systemic phenomenon resulting from the interaction among direct, structural, and cultural violence based on the perspective of Johan Galtung's theory of violence. This research used a qualitative approach, applying a case study design to Islamic Boarding Schools in West Java. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with perpetrators, Islamic Boarding School's administrators, regional Ministry of Religious Affairs officials, and women's activists, supported by limited observation and analysis of court-ruling documents. The data was analyzed thematically by linking empirical findings to the frameworks of direct, structural, and cultural violence. This study also analyzed the prevention of sexual violence in Islamic Boarding Schools. The results showed that sexual violence in Islamic Boarding Schools did not only include sexual harassment and exploitation by authority figures (direct violence) but also violence caused by the hierarchical, closed, and minimally supervised structure of Islamic Boarding Schools (structural violence), and violence legitimized by patriarchal cultural values, victim stigma, gender-biased religious interpretations, and a culture of excessive respect for *kyai* or spiritual leaders (cultural violence). To prevent sexual violence in Islamic Boarding Schools, it is essential to enhance institutional oversight, safeguard students, and foster a cultural shift. This study confirms the applicability of Galtung's theory in understanding violence within religious-based educational settings and recommends a comprehensive, multidimensional prevention strategy.

**Keywords:** Sexual Violence, Structural Violence, Cultural Violence, Islamic Boarding Schools, Power Relations

## Introduction

In the context of Islamic education in Indonesia, Islamic boarding schools (commonly known as *Pesantren* in Indonesia) have long been regarded as safe spaces for moral and spiritual education, helping students develop character, faith, and social discipline. Islamic boarding schools, as religious-based educational institutions deeply embedded in society, are frequently associated with values of piety, exemplary conduct, and paternalistic educational relationships. However, in recent years, this ideal image has been seriously challenged by the revelation of various cases of sexual violence committed by Islamic boarding school authorities against their students (Fuadi et al., 2023, 2024; Winarno et al., 2025). This phenomenon led us to question how effectively Islamic boarding schools really function as safe spaces for children and adolescents in their environment.

In this study, sexual violence is defined as any act, attempt, or sexual relationship involving physical or non-physical behavior, committed under force, manipulation, or an unequal relationship, that results in a violation of the victim's

bodily integrity, dignity, and right to autonomy. This definition refers to the definition by the World Health Organization, highlighting aspects of coercion and abuse of authority (WHO, 2024). This is also consistent with the formulation of the National Commission on Violence Against Women, which highlights the physical, psychological, and social impacts suffered by victims (Komnas Perempuan, 2025). Johan Galtung's theoretical framework describes sexual violence as a complex, multi-layered phenomenon involving direct, structural, and cultural violence, which he refers to as the "triangle of violence" (Galtung, 1969, 1990).

Data from the National Commission on Violence Against Women reveals that religious-based educational institutions, including Islamic boarding schools, had the second-highest number of reported cases of sexual violence in educational settings throughout the 2020–2024 period (see Figure 1). The reported violence includes physical and verbal harassment, molestation, and forced sexual intercourse (National Commission on Violence Against Women, 2025).

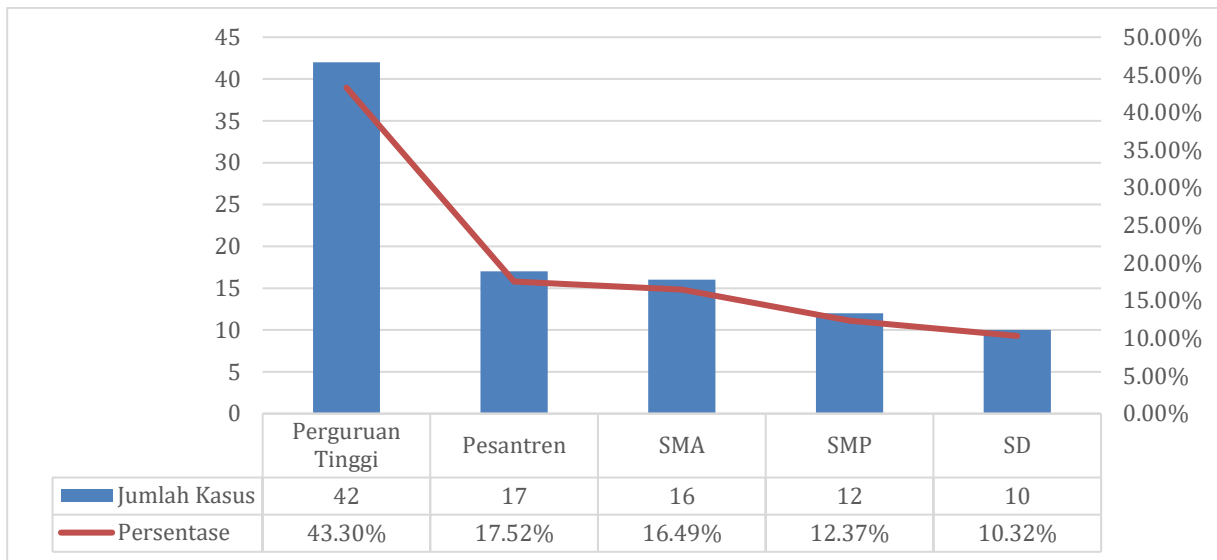


Figure 1. Sexual Violence in Educational Institutions  
(Source: National Commission on Violence Against Women, 2025)

In addition to these data, the author compiled media reports and court decisions from 2021 to 2025 and recorded at least 265 victims of sexual violence in Islamic boarding schools across Indonesia. The data indicate that the highest concentrations of cases are in West Nusa Tenggara (Kompas.com, 2023), East Java

(Liputan6.com, 2022), and West Java (Detik.com, 2023). Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of victims, indicating that sexual violence in Islamic boarding schools is not a sporadic incident but a recurring phenomenon with a certain geographic pattern.

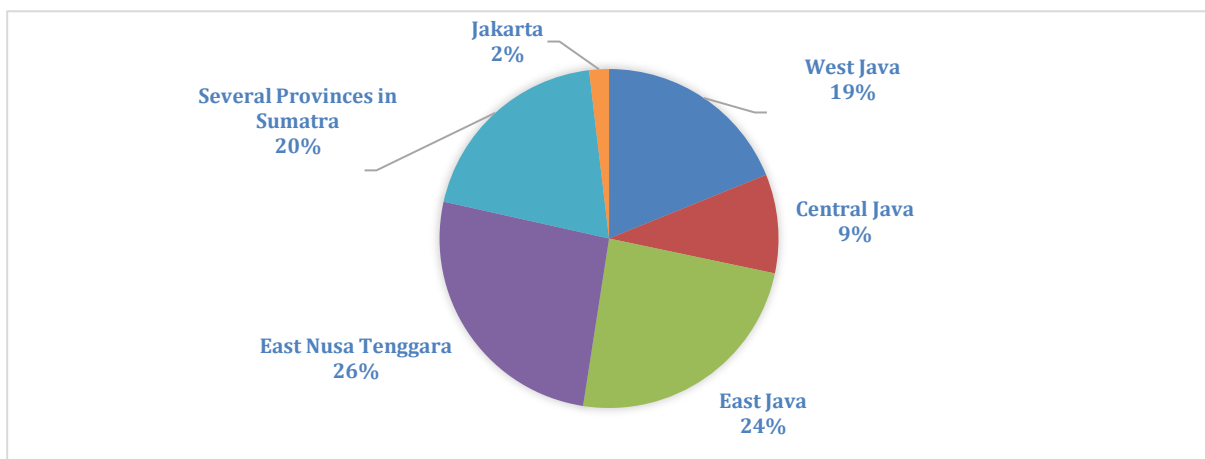


Figure 2.  
There were 265 victims of sexual violence in Indonesian Islamic boarding schools in 2021-2025  
(Source: Various Media Reports and Local Courts in 2025)

Regarding perpetrators, initial data indicate that sexual violence in Islamic

boarding schools is generally committed by individuals within the institution who have

structural and symbolic legitimacy. Most perpetrators are *kyai*, *ustadz*, and teachers at Islamic boarding schools, with some cases involving senior students. The perpetrators' role as educational and religious authorities enables the manipulation of power relations, grooming behaviors, and the framing of violence as integral to education, moral growth, or religious rituals (Bull & Page, 2021; Susilowati & Frans, 2025). This pattern shows that sexual violence in Islamic boarding schools cannot be separated from the social structure and power relations within the institution.

Statistically, the number of Islamic boarding schools reporting cases of sexual violence is quite small compared to the total number of Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia. However, research findings from the Center for the Study of Islam and Society (PPIM) at UIN Jakarta indicate that most Islamic boarding schools lack reliable student protection systems and oversight mechanisms (PPIM, 2025). This situation reveals significant structural vulnerabilities that are often hidden behind the perception of Islamic boarding schools as moral institutions. Moreover, poor reporting mechanisms, a preference for internal resolution, and stigma against victims contribute to low case disclosure and the continuation of sexual violence (National Commission on Violence Against Women, 2025).

This article starts with the main question: why does sexual violence persist in Islamic boarding schools, and how is this violence produced and reproduced in their social systems? The data reveal that sexual violence in Islamic boarding schools is not merely about individual misconduct or moral failure. Instead, it arises from a hierarchical social system and cultural values that normalize dominance.

Most previous research on sexual violence in Islamic boarding schools has separated the focus among perpetrators, victims, or institutional policies (Amri, 2022; Rahman & Maulana, 2024; Rahman et al., 2020; Sumawiharja et al., 2024). This partial perspective does not completely consider sexual violence as a result of the interaction among individual behavior, institutional structures, and cultural legitimacy (Dworkin & Weaver, 2021; Gómez, 2022; Willis, 2021). Therefore, this article seeks to address the research gap by examining cases of sexual violence in Islamic boarding schools as a systemic issue, using Johan Galtung's theory of violence as the framework. This approach is expected to offer theoretical contributions to the fields of the sociology of education, religion, and gender. Moreover, this research offers a foundational basis for developing a model to prevent sexual violence in Islamic boarding schools. It emphasizes not only

legal sanctions but also the importance of structural and cultural transformation within educational institutions, particularly Islamic boarding schools.

To explain why sexual violence persists in Islamic boarding schools, the author applied Johan Galtung's theory of violence as the main analytical framework. Galtung criticized the understanding of violence as limited to physical acts or individual aggression, and expanded the concept of violence to a multidimensional, systemic social phenomenon (Galtung, 1969, 1990). In this perspective, violence does not occur only when someone directly harms another. It encompasses situations where social structures and cultural value systems create conditions of injustice that consistently disadvantage certain groups.

Galtung distinguishes violence into three interrelated forms: direct violence, structural violence, and cultural violence. They form a triangle of violence, where direct violence is the most visible manifestation, while structural and cultural violence work latently and finally produce a condition that enables and legitimizes the violence (Galtung, 1990).

Direct violence is defined as concrete acts perpetrated against the victim, involving physical, psychological, or sexual harm. In the context of sexual violence, direct violence includes harassment, coercion, bodily exploitation,

and sexual intimidation (Dowds, 2020; Thakur, 2022). This type of violence is personal, with a clearly identified perpetrator and victim, often making it a central focus in criminal law. However, Galtung (1969) argued that direct violence is merely the tip of the iceberg, as its occurrence always depends on deeper structural and cultural conditions.

Structural violence refers to social, political, and institutional environments that consistently generate unequal access to protection, resources, and justice. This violence cannot be attributed to any particular actor, as it is embedded within the social system itself (Galtung, 1969). In educational institutions, structural violence arises from strict hierarchies, inadequate oversight, lack of victim protection systems, and unequal power relations between educators and students (Ngcobo et al., 2025; Raguz, 2021). In Islamic boarding schools, the hierarchical structure that places *kyai* and *ustadz* (terms for religious leaders in Indonesia) as the highest religious authorities and students (commonly known as *santri* in Indonesia) in a subordinate position creates conditions that are vulnerable to abuse of power.

Meanwhile, cultural violence refers to the symbolic elements of culture—like religion, ideology, language, and tradition—that serve to justify or normalize violence (Galtung, 1990). In patriarchal

societies, domination is frequently legitimized through gender-biased interpretations of religion and social norms (Bourdieu, 2001; Jasafat et al., 2025; Shoaib et al., 2025). In Islamic boarding schools, cultural violence is reflected in a culture of excessive respect for *kyai* and *ustadz*, stigma against victims, and the assumption that reporting violence defames an institution or religion.

These three forms of violence reinforce one another and create a cyclical relationship. Cultural violence justifies the moral legitimacy of the hierarchical violence in Islamic boarding schools (structural violence), whereas structural violence creates social conditions that lead to direct violence. Thus, Johan Galtung's theory of violence provides a strong conceptual foundation for understanding sexual violence in Islamic boarding schools as a multidimensional issue. It also highlights the need for prevention measures to focus not only on punishing perpetrators but also on transforming institutional frameworks and cultural values that have traditionally normalized violence.

Based on this context, this study not only aims to explore how sexual violence occurs in Islamic boarding schools through direct, structural, and cultural violence but also seeks to develop a prevention model that addresses the institutional and cultural factors underlying such violence.

**Research Method** This research used a qualitative approach and applied a case study design. Researchers selected a qualitative method to better understand the meanings, experiences, processes, and social dynamics behind sexual violence, dimensions that are difficult to adequately explain through a quantitative approach alone (Creswell & Creswell, 2021). This research was conducted for approximately 6 months, from July to December 2024.

The research location was West Java Province, selected purposively based on several key considerations: (1) reported cases of sexual violence in Islamic boarding schools in this province that have been legally processed and revealed through the media, (2) the availability of relevant key informants, (3) the researcher's access to Islamic boarding school communities and victim support institutions, and (4) the high number and distribution of cases of sexual violence across at least ten Islamic boarding schools, which makes this region have prominent empirical characteristics.

The total number of research informants was 10 people, consisting of two men and eight women. This composition was chosen purposefully to represent groups who are victims of sexual violence in Islamic boarding schools and actors who have authoritative positions within institutional structures. The general criteria for selecting informants were:

direct experience, involvement, or substantive knowledge of cases of sexual violence in Islamic boarding schools, and willingness to provide information consciously. The informants consisted of perpetrators, Islamic boarding school administrators, students, a *Nyai* (the term for the wife of the leader of the Islamic boarding school) who was once a member of the KPAI (Indonesian Child Protection Commission), regional Ministry of Religion officials, and activists from the National Commission on Violence Against Women. This diversity aims to obtain a comprehensive perspective from both internal and external institutions. The number of informants was decided by data saturation, stopping data collection when no new significant information was found (Creswell & Creswell, 2021).

Data were collected through three main techniques: in-depth interviews, limited observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted using an interview guide developed from Johan Galtung's theoretical framework of violence. Interviews lasted 30-60 minutes and were conducted from October to November 2024 in prisons, the Ministry of Religious Affairs office, and two Islamic boarding schools in West Java. The interview included questions about informants' experiences and perceptions

regarding the practice of sexual violence, power relations in Islamic boarding schools, case reporting mechanisms, and cultural norms that influence attitudes towards victims and perpetrators. Limited observations were conducted at Islamic boarding schools, where sexual violence occurred, to understand the social context of Islamic boarding schools, especially the interaction patterns between ustadz and students, the structure of the dormitory space, and daily oversight mechanisms. Observations were conducted for approximately 120 minutes in October 2024. This observation aimed to identify patterns of social relations that may contribute to structural vulnerability to sexual violence. In addition, document analysis was conducted on legal decisions from a court office in West Java. The names have been anonymized, and the district court area code has been replaced with XXX to maintain confidentiality (District Court X, 2022). A copy of this report was obtained directly from the court that ruled on the case of sexual violence at the Islamic boarding schools that we observed in our research.

Data were analyzed thematically by following the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusions (Creswell & Creswell, 2021). Interview data were transcribed and coded to identify key themes, and then categorized into the

concepts of direct, structural, and cultural violence (Galtung, 1990). To maintain the validity of the data, this study applied triangulation of sources and research methods to establish the credibility and resonance of the interpretations with informants' experiences.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Direct Violence: The Modus Operandi of Sexual Violence**

According to Johan Galtung's theory of violence, direct violence refers to concrete and visible acts of violence, which cause direct suffering on the victim, such as physical, sexual, or psychological harm (Galtung, 1969, 1990). Our results indicated that sexual violence in Islamic boarding schools occurred through a pattern of systematic, planned, and power-based direct violence. The violence did not occur as a single incident; it resulted from a series of exploitative acts that took advantage of the perpetrator's position of authority, the vulnerability of the victim, and the structural situation of the boarding school.

Based on informant interview documents (including those of the perpetrator) and court decisions, it was revealed that the main perpetrator in this case was an honorary teacher whose duties were serving as a religious teacher and supervising extracurricular activities. The perpetrator not only carried out educational

duties, but also lived in the Islamic boarding school environment and was assigned to night shifts in the student dormitory. The perpetrator introduced himself to us during an interview in prison:

*"I'm a religious teacher at this Islamic boarding school. I also teach extracurricular activities. I also got the shift assignment of guarding the female students' dormitory with other staff. As I was checking the rooms, I noticed one with its door open. I remembered the name of a female student, and suddenly my sexual desire sparked, prompting me to enter that room..."*(interview, November 20, 2024).

The interview excerpt above shows that his status as a religious teacher provides direct access, social legitimacy, and institutional trust from both the Islamic boarding school administrators and the students' parents. The perpetrator abused this trust to approach female students without arousing suspicion. This indicates that the violence stems directly from abuse of trust, which then becomes the initial foundation for sexual exploitation within the Islamic boarding school environment.

### **Vulnerable Time, Space, and Situations**

Data showed that sexual violence was carried out through a highly structured modus operandi. The perpetrator chose the time at night around 01.30 a.m., when the female students were sleeping, and the situation at the Islamic boarding school was

quite quiet. During the incident, the perpetrator intentionally manipulated the situation by requesting his fellow officers to take a break, so he could guard the dormitory alone.

The victim was a nine-year-old female student who lived in the female students' dormitory. The perpetrator entered the unlocked room, taking advantage of the weak security system in the bedroom. The victim was sleeping with other female students, so she was neither physically nor psychologically ready to defend herself. This pattern shows that direct violence was carried out by taking into account the most vulnerable situation for the victim and the safest for the perpetrator.

This vulnerability enables the perpetrator's actions because the female students' dormitory at this Islamic boarding school does not even have a basic security system, such as a door that can be properly locked from the inside or clear regulations defining who has the right to access the private space. Ironically, the dormitory area becomes accessible to non-female students at night. This design certainly does not adequately protect the students. From a structural violence perspective, this type of spatial arrangement enables sexual violence because the victim's vulnerability is determined not only by the perpetrator's actions but also by the design and strict

regulation of the social and physical spaces within the Islamic boarding school.

### **Coercive Sexual Violence, Silencing Victims, and False Solidarity among Perpetrators**

Acts of sexual violence are carried out in several stages and by force. The court ruling documents reveal the detailed incident in which the perpetrator first observed the sleeping victim, then opened and lowered the victim's clothes. When the victim woke up and tried to fight him, the perpetrator did not stop but instead waited until the victim calmed down. The perpetrator covered the victim's mouth with a cloth or sarong to prevent her from screaming or calling for help.

Sexual violence is carried out under coercion and causes serious physical and psychological suffering. This finding is consistent with court ruling documents that noted medical evidence of a torn hymen due to blunt force. In this context, direct violence is very real, personal, and brutal, leaving child victims powerless.

Another important finding indicates the involvement of more than one perpetrator. The testimony of a student witness, as recorded in the court decision document, revealed the alleged involvement of other religious teachers. Although these allegations were not all addressed in a single decision, the findings suggest there may be a pattern of collective

exploitation or a network of sexual violence within the Islamic boarding school environment.

This pattern indicates that direct violence is not always carried out by a single perpetrator but may involve more than one actor who cover for each other and create a false sense of solidarity. In some cases, sexual violence may occur in a collective and coordinated manner, with a group of perpetrators supporting each other to reinforce their dominance and instill fear in the victim. These practices not only exacerbate the psychological effects of violence but also reveal how power operates systematically and extensively within institutional environments. In this context, direct violence becomes part of a broader practice of power, supported by collective power relations and by weak institutional control mechanisms.

### **Post-Incident Normalization and Victim Trauma Management**

After committing sexual violence, the perpetrator removed physical traces by cleaning up semen at the scene. After that, the perpetrator returned to the guard post and carried out his activities as usual, as if nothing had happened. This post-incident normalization illustrates how direct violence can happen unnoticed within the closed environment of Islamic boarding schools.

This case came to light about eight months after the incident, following testimony from other students who had also faced violence. Delayed disclosure indicates the presence of structural and psychological barriers in the reporting process. The victims, who are still children, were traumatized and fearful, but they can only rely entirely on the Islamic boarding school, leaving them without a safe place to report their concerns.

Overall, both interview data and court ruling documents indicate that direct violence in Islamic boarding schools is a form of systematic sexual exploitation of minors by educational and religious authority figures. This violence is marked by abuse of authority and trust, carefully chosen timing and location, exploitation of the victim's vulnerability, indications of multiple perpetrators' involvement, a culture of silence, and the removal of evidence.

This finding supports the article's claim that violence in Islamic boarding schools is more than just an individual issue, but a prominent manifestation of a social system that allows violence to happen and persist. This direct violence can only be fully understood when viewed as an entry point to analyzing the underlying structural and cultural violence.

**Structural Violence: Power Relations, Islamic Boarding School Governance,**

### and Weak Oversight Systems

From Johan Galtung's view, structural violence involves social and institutional setups that consistently marginalize specific groups, leading to injustice and suffering without requiring direct physical violence from perpetrators (Galtung, 1969). The findings of this study indicate that sexual violence in Islamic boarding schools occurs within a hierarchical institutional structure, with minimal oversight and without an adequate protection system for students. This structure enables direct violence to occur and persist, and it is difficult to notice.

One of the main characteristics of Islamic boarding schools is the centralization of authority in the figure of the *kyai*, or the leader of the Islamic boarding school. In practice, the *kyai* not only plays the role of a spiritual leader but also the highest decision maker in the management of the Islamic boarding school. An informant from the regional Ministry of Religion stated that the position of the *kiai* is very dominant and relatively autonomous from state intervention. The informant stated that:

*“Currently, I find it ironic that supervision at Islamic boarding schools remains a mess. In my opinion, Islamic boarding schools need oversight instruments to oversee them. Because so far, Islamic boarding schools have been*

*very typical of Indonesia, they can suddenly appear and be managed by a kiai, or masyayikh, or ustad. And then, the government intervened in granting legalization. However, I guess, the kyai holds absolute authority in managing the Islamic boarding school. So, in my opinion, the weakness in the regulation is how to supervise the implementation at this Islamic boarding school.”* (Interview, October 21, 2024). This type of authority structure creates a semi-closed environment in Islamic boarding schools, limiting external oversight.

Structural violence is reinforced by the absence of clear and operational oversight regulations. Unlike formal schools with routine supervision system and a well-structured child protection mechanism, many religious educational institutions, like Islamic boarding schools, lack a standardized and sustainable supervision mechanism. Research on formal education shows that, in the context of schools, poor structures of institutional supervision and support can lead to patterns of violence that go unnoticed and ineffectively addressed, affecting the safety and well-being of students (Shabangu, 2025). Furthermore, cross-institutional studies have revealed that without proper reporting procedures, anti-violence committees, and external engagement, gender-based violence and power relations

tend to persist due to a lack of institutional accountability (UNESCO, 2019). An informant from the Ministry of Religion acknowledged these limitations by stating the following:

*“I feel that Islamic boarding schools lack oversight regulations. Or, you could say, their regulations are poor compared to regular madrasas (formal Islamic schools). Regulations within Islamic boarding schools are not yet equipped with supervisory regulations. For example, if we compare the regulations with those already in place in regular madrasas, they (the madrasas) have policies on curriculum, teachers, school governance, madrasas, and quality assurance”* (Interview, October 21, 2024). This condition makes it difficult to detect abusive power relations early on, including sexual violence that occurs in the dormitory environment.

The structure of Islamic boarding schools as closed boarding communities also contributes significantly to structural violence. Students live in a space completely controlled by the Islamic boarding school administrators, with limited access to external parties. An informant from the Islamic boarding school said that there was almost no complaint mechanism for students. The informant said: *“(when there was a problem) Let’s sit down together and talk face to face. We’ll*

*find a solution. I don’t know how, but suddenly the student reported it directly to the Regional Police.* (Interview, October 23, 2024). The Islamic boarding school demands that any issues be resolved internally. As a result, students are confused about whom to report to outside the school. This secrecy ultimately leads to conditions where violence can persist for a long time without external intervention.

Furthermore, the power inequalities between *ustadz* and *santri* are a very determining structural element. *Ustadz* is not only a teacher but also a moral and spiritual figure who must be obeyed. In this context, students (especially minors) are in a subordinate position, making it difficult for them to refuse or report violence. Informants from the National Commission on Violence Against Women emphasized that this kind of power relationship is the main obstacle to reporting cases. This informant said: *“power relation factor, between students and their kyai or ustadz can create threats and criminalization against the victims, and always positioned them as those who are blamed and pressured with: ‘You just keep quiet, and I’ll guarantee your graduation...’”* (Interview, October 30, 2024).

Structural violence is also evident in the lack of standard protocols for student protection, including operational guidelines for preventing and addressing sexual

violence. The findings in this study indicate that most Islamic boarding schools still lack SOPs for reporting, victim assistance, or transparent sanction mechanisms for perpetrators. An informant, *Nyai*, wife of the leader of an Islamic boarding school, highlighted this condition by stating, “*As long as there is no clear system, everything depends on the goodwill of the leader of the Islamic boarding school... If the leader is not sensitive, it will make the students very vulnerable.*” (Interview, November 6, 2024).

Another important structural aspect is the state’s limited capacity to exercise effective supervision. An informant from the Ministry of Religion revealed that poor supervision of Islamic boarding schools in the regions was due to a lack of budget and human resources. The informant said, “*It is impossible for us to oversee all Islamic boarding schools regularly. There are so many... in many areas... Meanwhile, our human resources and supervisory budget are very limited... You can imagine, the budget for a single trip was only 300 thousand. Of course, this does not cover supervision of all Islamic boarding schools...*” (Interview, October 21, 2024). As a result, the government frequently only intervenes after cases of sexual violence are revealed to the public.

Therefore, sexual violence in Islamic boarding schools cannot be

understood simply as individual deviation; it is a consequence of unequal social and institutional structures. Centralized authority, poor regulation and supervision, institutional closure, and the students’ subordinate status have led to structural violence that allows for direct violence. Based on Galtung’s framework, these structures work latently but effectively in producing and reproducing sexual violence. Therefore, preventive measures simply involving legal sanctions against perpetrators are insufficient. It is necessary to reform governance in Islamic boarding schools, strengthen oversight systems, and develop student-protection mechanisms to support victims.

These findings also indicate that poor oversight is related to the way state and religious institutions have not yet seriously viewed sexual violence in educational institutions as an urgent issue. As a result, student protection regulations, reporting mechanisms, and case-handling procedures remain limited and even ineffective. In many cases, settlements are handled internally within institutions, hindering the legal process and victim protection. This condition shows that poor institutional supervision can indirectly reproduce vulnerability to violence in the educational environment of Islamic boarding schools.

**Cultural Violence: Normalization,**

### **Stigma, and the Culture of Silence in Islamic Boarding Schools**

In Johan Galtung's theoretical framework, cultural violence refers to the symbolic aspects of culture, such as religion, ideology, language, and tradition, that justify, normalize, or even obscure violence (Galtung, 1990). Cultural violence does not work through direct physical coercion, but through systems of meaning that make the inequalities and suffering experienced by victims seem normal, legitimate, or acceptable. This study's findings showed that sexual violence in Islamic boarding schools was justified by specific cultural beliefs and religious views that stigmatized victims, shielded perpetrators, and promoted silence to uphold the institution's honor.

### **Victims Positioned as the Source of Shame**

One of the most noticeable forms of cultural violence is the stigmatization of victims as a source of shame. In many cases, victims of sexual violence are not seen as individuals who need to be protected. They are frequently seen as sources of problems that tarnish the reputation of the Islamic boarding school and their families. The findings of this study indicate that the concept of shame is part of a highly effective social mechanism to silence victims and their families,

particularly in cases of violence within religious-based educational institutions.

This stigmatization applies not only at the social level but also at the moral and religious levels. The victim is positioned as an individual who cannot protect herself, so that the blame is shifted from the perpetrator to the victim. An informant, *Nyai*, emphasized that in the context of religious institutions, this kind of stigma becomes a powerful tool because it is closely tied to the moral interpretation of religion. She said, *"In many cases, the victim feels guilty, as if everything that happened was her fault. This is because religion is used to judge the victim's behavior, not the perpetrator's"* (Interview, November 6, 2024). Meanwhile, an informant from the Islamic boarding school, when asked about the victim, described the victim with an indecent framing of her behavior by saying: *"...They contacted our teacher and asked: My daughter is not lying, is she? Then, we said, "Well, kids lie sometimes. She likes to play with soap in the bathroom. I don't know. Her teacher told her to stop playing with soap all the time. Anyway, we told her. She likes to play with soap in her intimate areas..."* (Interview, October 23, 2024).

Furthermore, the study revealed that reporting sexual violence was seen as a threat to the reputation of Islamic boarding schools, rather than as a pursuit of justice.

Islamic boarding school administrators tended to prioritize the institution's image over victims' safety and recovery. This is stated in the verdict document, which reveals that the institution once tried to pressure the victim and family not to disclose the case to law enforcement officials. From Galtung's perspective, this attitude constitutes a form of cultural violence because maintaining the institution's reputation is used to justify silencing the victim and shielding the perpetrator (Galtung, 1990).

Islamic boarding schools often emphasize morality as a key educational goal. However, they do not always have mechanisms to guarantee that these moral values are upheld fairly and responsibly. Institutions often ignore or even discredit victims of sexual violence in order to protect their reputation. Consequently, the victim is portrayed as someone who threatens the honor of the Islamic boarding school, while the perpetrator is concealed to protect the institution's reputation. This kind of practice creates what is called a pseudo-morality narrative, in which morality is maintained symbolically on the surface, but, at the same time, covers up injustice toward victims within Islamic boarding schools.

### **Patriarchy and the Subordination of Female Students**

Patriarchal values have also driven cultural violence in Islamic boarding schools that position female students as subjects who must obey, maintain purity, and be responsible for moral honor, but authority remains in the hands of men (*kyai* or *ustadz*). This suggests that in cases of sexual violence, the victim is often unfairly the one questioned, rather than the perpetrator.

Informants from the National Commission on Violence Against Women emphasized that this pattern is a form of gender-based symbolic violence. The informant stated that women are often expected to uphold morals, whereas men, as perpetrators, are shielded by authority and religious symbols. This pattern is consistent with Heise's (1998) findings that sexual violence cannot be separated from unequal gender norms.

The findings of this study indicate that poor oversight is also related to the fact that state and religious institutions have not fully recognized sexual violence in educational institutions as a serious problem. As a result, regulations for protecting students in Islamic boarding schools, reporting mechanisms, and case-handling procedures remain limited and often ineffective. In many cases, settlements are carried out internally within the institution, hindering the legal process and victim protection. This condition shows

that poor institutional oversight can indirectly reproduce vulnerability to violence in Islamic boarding schools.

Likewise, cultural violence is related to the culture of excessive respect for *kyai* and *ustadz*. This research found that this culture is a key element of cultural violence. *Kyai* is positioned as a figure who represents morals and spirituality, who is almost impossible to make mistakes. This culture leads to doubts about the victim's testimony, while the perpetrator's defense is more easily accepted. According to Galtung, this condition demonstrates how violence becomes symbolically justified through a value system that shields authority figures from critique (Galtung, 1990).

These findings indicate that sexual violence in Islamic boarding schools is reinforced not just by individual behaviors and institutional structures but also by cultural values and religious symbols that legitimize violence and silence victims. The network of meanings that protects perpetrators and hinders justice for victims includes the stigma of victims as sources of shame, the view of reporting as a threat to reputation, patriarchal control, gender-biased religious interpretations, and a culture of extreme respect and obedience to *kyai*.

According to Johan Galtung, cultural violence serves as a symbolic basis

that legitimizes and normalizes structural and direct violence. This study confirms that preventing sexual violence in Islamic boarding schools cannot rely solely on legal sanctions or structural reform; it also necessitates a transformation of underlying values, religious interpretations, and institutional culture that have historically supported such violence.

### **Sexual Violence as a Product of Interaction among Direct, Structural, and Cultural Violence**

This research reveals that sexual violence in Islamic boarding schools should not be seen as a random incident or just an individual deviation. From the perspective of Johan Galtung's theory of violence, sexual violence is the product of the interaction among three dimensions of violence: direct, structural, and cultural. These dimensions mutually support and reproduce one another within a particular social system (Galtung, 1969, 1990). This approach allows for an understanding of sexual violence in Islamic boarding schools as a complex phenomenon arising from power relations, institutional governance, and cultural values.

Direct violence manifests through concrete actions, including harassment, sexual exploitation, and psychological manipulation, by religious teachers against their students. This dimension is the most visible empirical event, in which the

perpetrator and victim are identified, and it is generally the main focus of the criminal law approach. However, as Galtung (1990) explains, direct violence is merely a surface expression of a more profound system of violence. In Islamic boarding schools, harassment is embedded within a social context that lacks sufficient protective measures and often places female students in a subordinate role.

In structural violence, the social system of Islamic boarding schools creates conditions that allow for direct violence. The hierarchical structure that places the highest authority in the hands of the *kyai* and *ustadz*, the free access of authority figures to students' private spaces, the absence of standard procedures to protect (female) students, and the character of Islamic boarding schools as closed communities create a social configuration that is vulnerable to abuse of power. According to Galtung (1969), this type of structure constitutes a form of violence because it systematically results in unequal access to security, protection, and justice. Students, especially children and female students, are vulnerable because they are completely dependent on institutions and authority figures.

Structural violence is not impartial; it is justified through cultural violence embedded in symbols and values. These include deep respect for *kyai* or *ustadz*,

viewing victims as a source of shame, patriarchal systems, and gender-biased religious interpretations. Together, they create a framework that normalizes or makes violence seem acceptable. Cultural violence provides a mechanism of moral legitimacy that justifies unequal power relations and silences victims through guilt, fear, and shame (Galtung, 1990). In this context, the victim not only suffers physical and sexual trauma but also symbolic violence through stigmatization and delegitimization of their experiences.

These three dimensions interact to create a cycle of violence that is hard to break. Cultural violence provides moral legitimacy for the hierarchical structure of Islamic boarding schools (structural violence), while structural violence creates opportunities for concrete abuse (direct violence). Direct violence is then reinforced by demands for silence and by stigma against the victim, so the cycle continues. Therefore, sexual violence in Islamic boarding schools must be acknowledged as a product of a hierarchical social system and cultural values that normalize domination, not merely as individual deviation.

This analysis aligns with Brownmiller's (1993) assertion that sexual violence is a social control mechanism for maintaining domination, not merely an individual sexual act. In Islamic boarding

schools, domination is not only based on gender but also on religious and institutional authority. Sexual violence is a tool to assert the *ustadz*'s superior position over the students, both physically and symbolically.

This approach is also consistent with Heise's (1998) ecological model, which conceptualizes sexual violence as the outcome of interactions among individual factors, interpersonal relationships, communities, and social structures. This study shows that Islamic boarding schools, as social communities, play a major role in shaping the conditions that enable violence to happen and continue. From Foucault's perspective, sexual violence in Islamic boarding schools can be understood as a practice of power that operates through bodily discipline and moral control, in which religious authorities regulate students' bodies and obedience (Bethari, 2024; Dzukroni & Isnaini, 2023; Foucault, 2012; Supriyono et al., 2025). Meanwhile, Bourdieu's (2001) idea of symbolic violence describes how victims accept this domination as normal, leading to violence happening without open resistance.

By integrating Galtung's theory with the perspectives of Brownmiller, Heise, Foucault, and Bourdieu, the authors want to emphasize that sexual violence in Islamic boarding schools is a multidimensional phenomenon that results

from the interaction among individual actions, social structures, and cultural legitimacy. Therefore, it can be concluded that sexual violence is not simply a criminal incident; it is a symptom of a social system that fails to guarantee justice and protection for the most vulnerable groups.

### **Prevention Model for Sexual Violence in Islamic Boarding Schools**

Based on empirical findings and theoretical analysis using Johan Galtung's violence perspective, the authors propose a multidimensional model for preventing sexual violence in Islamic boarding schools. This model emphasizes that prevention cannot be limited to direct violence. It must simultaneously address the dimensions of structural and cultural violence (Galtung, 1990). Thus, prevention focuses on transforming the social system of Islamic boarding schools and the cultural values that have so far created opportunities for violence to occur and persist.

### **Prevention of Direct Violence through Victim Protection and Sanctions**

In cases of direct violence, prevention efforts aim to establish safe, accessible, and confidential reporting mechanisms that prioritize victims. Islamic boarding schools need to have a special unit or trained student protection team to handle cases of sexual violence. Furthermore, any form of sexual violence must be addressed through the legal process without

compromise to uphold the principles of justice and protect victims' rights.

This approach aligns with the recommendations of WHO (2024) and Heise (1998), which emphasize the importance of a rapid and victim-centered institutional response system. In the context of Islamic boarding schools, this step entails abolishing internal settlements that prioritize institutional reputation at the expense of student safety. Preventing direct violence also involves educating students about body boundaries and basic sexual literacy, helping them recognize early signs of violence.

### **Reform of Structural Violence through Transformation of Islamic Boarding School Systems and Facilities**

In structural violence, prevention should be targeted at reforming the hierarchical and closed organizational system of Islamic boarding schools. It is necessary for Islamic boarding schools to develop standard operating procedures (SOPs) to protect students, including limiting religious teachers' access to students' private spaces, establishing a multi-layered oversight system, and implementing an external audit mechanism conducted by the Ministry of Religion or an independent institution. This SOP is important for reducing power imbalances and providing a clear path to justice for victims.

Furthermore, this article assesses that structural reforms include training for *ustadz* and Islamic boarding school administrators on the ethics of teacher-student relationships, child protection, and gender perspectives. This perspective aligns with Galtung's (1969) view that addressing structural violence requires social system reforms capable of controlling inequality. In other words, individual sanctions alone are not enough; efforts must focus on the structural organization of Islamic boarding schools as educational institutions.

It is also necessary to develop facilities that enhance the sense of security and protection for female students who are vulnerable to violence, including installing CCTV, providing adequate lighting, assigning female supervisors for female students, and establishing a hotline for survivors to file complaints. It is also important to establish an independent Islamic boarding school ethics council that includes representatives of guardians and older students, as well as *ustadz* and *Nyai*, who serve as the caretakers of the Islamic boarding school.

### **Transformation of Cultural Violence through Changes in Religious Values and Interpretations**

Prevention of cultural violence involves changing the values and norms that have justified sexual violence. The

stigma of victims as a source of shame needs to be replaced with a paradigm of protection and justice. The culture of high respect for religious leaders must be balanced with principles of accountability and moral responsibility. Furthermore, religious education should be more inclusive and gender-just to challenge gender-biased interpretations of religion. Ongoing efforts should promote gender equality, empower individuals to report violence, and enable them to make decisions about their own bodies through diverse media, such as training sessions, flyers, Instagram, and more.

This transformation aligns with Bourdieu's (2001) view on the importance of dismantling symbolic violence that renders domination seem normal. In the context of Islamic boarding schools, cultural change can be fostered through a curriculum that addresses gender justice, children's rights, and the ethics of power relations in religious education. This approach is also supported by Brownmiller (1993), who emphasized that sexual violence can be prevented sustainably only if the social norms that normalize domination are changed.

By incorporating these three levels of prevention, the model positioned Islamic boarding schools not just as problematic objects but also as subjects of social transformation. Preventing sexual violence

should be integrated into the reform of Islamic educational institutions to build a fairer and safer educational system focused on protecting students.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the explanation above, this study concludes that sexual violence in Islamic boarding schools cannot be understood as a mere individual deviation; it is a product of the interaction between direct, structural, and cultural violence. It is evident that direct violence has occurred in the form of harassment, exploitation, and manipulation of victims by perpetrators who have religious authority. Structural violence appears through the hierarchical, closed governance of Islamic boarding schools and the absence of mechanisms to oversee and protect students. Meanwhile, cultural violence grows through the stigma against victims, patriarchy, gender-biased religious interpretations, and a culture of respect for *ustadz/kyai*, which justifies domination and suppresses criticism.

Based on the perspective of Johan Galtung's theory of violence and the thoughts of Brownmiller, Heise, Foucault, and Bourdieu, this article emphasizes that sexual violence in Islamic boarding schools is a multidimensional phenomenon rooted in certain social systems and cultural values. Sexual violence goes beyond being just a criminal act; it reflects a social system that does not adequately protect or provide

justice for the most vulnerable, especially female students. It is unfortunate that Islamic boarding schools, as educational institutions and social communities, have become places that create conditions that allow violence to occur, persist, and be reproduced.

Based on these findings, this article recommends three strategic steps. *First*, it is necessary for Islamic boarding schools to establish a standardized student protection system, such as a safe reporting SOP, restrictions on access to female students' private spaces, and strict sanctions against perpetrators of sexual violence. *Second*, the Ministry of Religion and local governments must strengthen external oversight mechanisms for Islamic boarding schools and ensure that all cases of sexual violence are resolved through legal processes without institutional intervention. *Third*, cultural transformation is required through gender-just religious education, a reinterpretation of the value of obedience to teachers within an ethical and human rights framework, and systematic efforts to eliminate the stigma against victims. Theoretically and practically, this research emphasizes the importance of a multidimensional approach to breaking the negative cycle of sexual violence in Islamic boarding schools.

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