



The Role of Pesantren in Overcoming the Interest of Same-Sex in Islamic Boarding School

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Abstract

The phenomenon of same-sex attraction in the Islamic boarding school environment is a complex issue that cannot be understood solely in the framework of moral deviation. This research aims to examine in depth the role of Islamic boarding schools in dealing with the tendency of homosexual behavior among students, by viewing it as a form of social maladjustment triggered by the limitations of opposite-sex interaction, lack of affection, and psychosocial pressure. Using a descriptive qualitative approach with the case study method, data is obtained through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation in several Islamic boarding schools that strictly implement gender segregation. Research results show that homosexual behavior in Islamic boarding schools is often situational and develops as a form of emotional escape from the environment that curbs the psychological needs of students. Same-sex relationships are rooted in the need for affection, security, and acceptance that are not available in the family system or Islamic boarding school institutions. The dominant response of Islamic boarding schools in the form of sanctions has not touched the root of the problem, so a new approach that is more holistic and empathetic is needed. This finding emphasizes the importance of integrating sexuality education based on Islamic values, psychosocial assistance, and reformulating the role of Islamic boarding school caregivers as emotional mentors. This research recommends the transformation of the coaching system in Islamic boarding schools to be more adaptive to the psychosocial dynamics of teenagers, so that Islamic boarding schools are not only a moral fortress, but also a spiritually and emotionally healthy growth space.

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Introduction

Islamic boarding schools, which are a form of traditional Islamic educational institutions, have played a significant role in the process of internalizing moral values and shaping the character of the young generation in Indonesia since ancient times (Zahroni et al., 2024). The education system employed emphasizes strict segregation between male and female students to preserve Islamic values, particularly in regulating social interactions. However, this system is not without psychological and social consequences. For instance, research indicates that students from single-sex schools experience significantly higher levels of mixed-gender anxiety and fewer friendships with the opposite sex both during their schooling years and into college compared to peers in coeducational settings (Wong et al., 2018). Additionally, a qualitative study conducted in Indonesian Islamic boarding schools sheds light on how stringent rules regarding opposite-sex interaction in dormitory settings can lead to internal emotional tensions among adolescent students, even as they learn to manage emerging attractions within moral frameworks (Pakpahan et al., 2025). Same-sex acts can be interpreted as an expression that refers to a romantic or sexual relationship between an individual and an individual of the same sex who has the same visual orientation in terms of liking the same sex. Same-sex relationships can take many forms such as marriage or casual partner relationships such as dating (Juliani, 2023).

Multazam states that the social and physical environment has a significant influence on the formation of individual behavior and identity, including in terms of affective orientation. Meanwhile, (Multazam, 2021) research by found that the implementation of very strict gender segregation in the pesantren environment has the potential to be one of the factors that trigger the emergence of a tendency of same-sex attraction behavior among students, because affectional and biological impulses are not channeled reasonably. Meanwhile, it shows that intensive emotional relationships between students, which develop in a homogeneous and closed environment such as pesantren, can give birth to same-sex relationship patterns that are formed not due to innate factors, but in response to alienation, inner pressure, and imitation of behavior from seniors who show a tendency to (Aziz Jayana, 2021; Fikri & Wardana, 2019) be attracted to the same sex. This phenomenon raises important questions about the ability of pesantren to manage and overcome the tendency of same-sex attraction behavior

among students which, from the perspective of pesantren, is often considered a form of deviance or social maladjustment. In this context, maladjustment is understood as the incompatibility of an individual in adjusting to the values, norms, and social expectations of the environment in which he or she is located (Méndez et al., 2021). Same-sex attraction among students is often not a definitive expression of sexual orientation, but an adaptive response to emotional pressure, limited opposite-sex interaction, lack of family attention, and difficult economic factors.

Pesantren face serious challenges in overcoming the spread of same-sex attraction behavior among students (Duwi et al., 2024). They emphasized the importance of preventive and educational approaches that are not only based on sanctions, but also on the spiritual development and psychosocial understanding of students comprehensively. On the other hand, through (Dwi Nugraha, 2023) *the Maqamat 3T program*, it underlines the importance of integrating Islamic values with psychopedagogical approaches in shaping identity resilience and managing the psychological crisis of Muslim adolescents. This approach has proven effective in increasing adolescents' self-awareness and adaptability in dealing with social and emotional pressures, especially in religious education environments. However, the literature that explicitly discusses how pesantren respond to and handle the phenomenon of same-sex attraction is still very limited, especially with an approach based on experience and the emotional needs of the students themselves.

With reference to this background, this study is directed to achieve the goal of in-depth analysis of the role of pesantren in dealing with the tendency of same-sex attraction as a form of social maladjustment among students. The urgency of this research lies in the importance of the formulation of preventive and curative strategies that not only focus on normative and punishment aspects, but also touch the emotional, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of students. The main argument in this study is that the phenomenon of same-sex attraction in the pesantren environment cannot be understood simplistic as a mere moral deviation, but rather as a complex symptom of social, psychological, and structural dynamics in pesantren life. Therefore, a multidimensional approach is needed that integrates religious, psychosocial, and educational aspects in formulating policies and programs for student development. The basic assumption of this study is that the tendency of same-sex attraction in pesantren

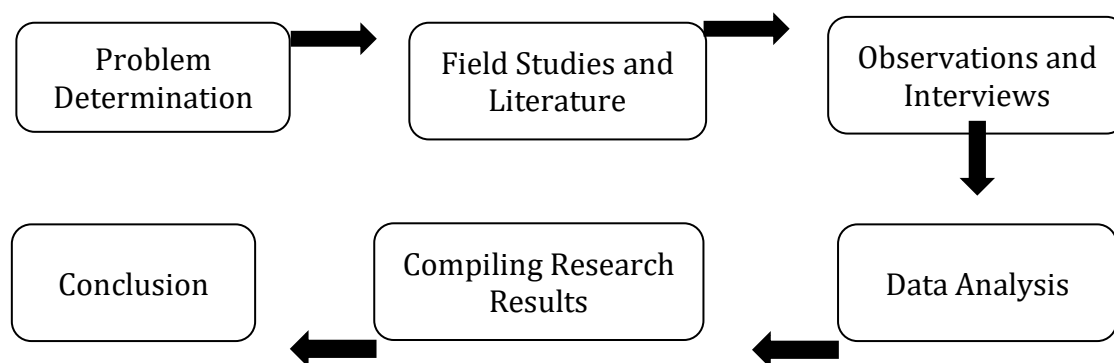
is situational and reversible, and can be addressed through a comprehensive, empathetic, and Islamic values-based approach that is *rahmatan lil 'alamin*.

Method

The type of research used in this study is qualitative descriptive. This approach was chosen because it is able to uncover and explain complex social phenomena through an in-depth exploration of experiences, meanings, and dynamics that occur in the field. This approach relies on data collection methods such as six interviews, and observations that aim to understand social realities from the perspective of the subject being studied. Descriptive qualitative research is particularly appropriate in examining sensitive issues such as sexual orientation in a strict religious environment, as it allows researchers to capture social and psychological nuances that cannot be quantitatively measured (Aziz Jayana, 2021).

This research also applies a case study approach to specifically explore the dynamics of same-sex attraction in the Islamic boarding school environment, which was conducted over a period of two months. This method allows for intensive data collection in specific contexts to get a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon that is occurring. The data collection process was carried out through in-depth interviews with students who had homosexual tendencies or had experienced social pressure due to their sexual orientation. In addition, participatory observation was carried out to observe the pattern of social interaction of students and indications of maladaptation to *pesantren* norms.

The researcher also utilizes documentation in the form of rules, internal policies, and rules of Islamic boarding schools to examine the social regulations that shape the behavior of students. All data were analyzed using thematic techniques, which aimed to identify patterns of behavior, social pressure, and psychological impacts that arise due to stigmatization or responses of Islamic boarding school institutions. The location of the study was chosen purposively, namely in *pesantren* that implemented a strict separation between male and female students, to understand the possible relationship between limited interaction of the opposite sex and the onset of homosexual behavior. This is in line with the findings, which state that a lack of understanding of sexuality and a gender-homogeneous environment can trigger same-sex attraction behavior among *pesantren*-based adolescents (Maisaroh et al., 2023).



Picture 1. Research flow

Result and Discussion

Factors Triggering Same-Sex Attraction in the Islamic Boarding School Environment

The phenomenon of same-sex attraction in the Islamic boarding school environment revealed through field observation shows the complexity of the problem that cannot be explained solely in a moralistic framework. In this study, same-sex attraction that emerged among students appeared more as a response to psychosocial pressures and limitations of emotional interaction that occurred in a homogeneous and controlled social environment, rather than as an expression of permanent or innate sexual orientation.

Based on the findings in this study, it can be seen that the initial cause of the emergence of same-sex attraction in Islamic boarding schools is the implementation of a very strict gender segregation system between male and female students. Although this system is intended to maintain the values of decency and morality, in practice it limits the space for healthy and balanced social interaction between the genders. When emotional needs and affection for the opposite sex are not channeled naturally, some students end up forming an emotional closeness with the same sex that is more accessible in that environment. On the other hand, this gender segregation does not stand alone, but is supported by a number of other conditions such as lack of affection from the family, psychosocial pressure, limited counseling facilities, and weak family economic conditions (Yuliani & Al Hafis, 2025). Many students come from family backgrounds that are not warm or experience emotional crises, so they have entered the pesantren environment in a psychologically fragile state. In such a limited and homogeneous social situation, they tend to establish strong emotional bonds with same-

sex friends as a form of outlet for the need for attention, security, and acceptance. As revealed by the resource person with the initials "W",

"I know there is a friend, he used to enter the cottage because of force, so he was very quiet. She cried in the corner because she missed home. Well, there was one friend who was the first to come in and say, 'you're not alone here.' Since then they have become very close. Even this friend likes to pay more attention, even waiting for him in front of the bathroom, preparing clothes, and food, and that's it."

This confirms that the relationship formed is more of a form of seeking a sense of security, attention, and appreciation that he did not get in his place of origin. When the needs of affection and social relations are not channeled reasonably, some students end up building emotional closeness with the same sex as a form of compensation.

Emotional Relations and Psychosocial Context of Students as a Form of Adaptation

The phenomenon of same-sex attraction that occurs in the pesantren environment cannot be separated from the background of the students' lives which tend to be complex and diverse. After mapping the various external factors that trigger the emergence of same-sex relationships, it is important to examine more deeply how the psychological and emotional conditions of students contribute to shaping the dynamics of these relationships. The relationships that are established between students are not only the result of limited social interaction, but also a reflection of the individual's adaptation process to an environment that lacks emotional safe spaces.

Conditions like this become increasingly complex when associated with the psychosocial background of vulnerable students. Some of them, such as those experienced by students with the initials "K" and "R", grew up in families with low emotional attachment. The absence of fathers and mothers who work as Female Workers (TKW) abroad causes a void of affection that is carried to the pesantren environment. This phenomenon is also strengthened by the results of in-depth interviews with a number of resource persons. The resource person with the initials "F", said that,

"Yes, sir, I know for myself. There is a friend of mine, he has never been close to his parents since he was a child. He was left with his mother's cooperation, his mother was a TKW in Arabia, so he was lonely. When he was younger, he became very close to his older brother who cared deeply about him. At first it was like a brother, but after a while it seemed more than that."

This statement shows that the emotional relationships between fellow students are often rooted from the void of affection since childhood. With a fragile family background and a closed social system of pesantren students, students become more vulnerable in forming same-sex relationships as a form of venting unmet emotional needs.

In such a social atmosphere, there is an intensive emotional relationship between fellow students, which slowly shifts into affective and sexual relationships. This phenomenon does not appear instantly, but rather as a result of long-lasting and consistent emotional closeness. In some cases, the relationship was initially in the form of friendship or a relationship known as *a relationship* known as a relationship between siblings between generations that developed into a relationship of emotional dependence. This can be seen in the case of "K" who has a close relationship with senior students who are protective and attentive. Similarly, in the case of "N" and "L" who show a very high level of attachment, even to the point of physical intensity such as sleeping in one blanket and cuddling regularly. These findings confirm the results of previous research conducted by, which confirms that same-sex attraction relationships in the pesantren environment cannot be immediately viewed as a form of permanent sexual orientation. In the context of extreme social and emotional segregation or segregation, same-sex relationships are often used as an escape mechanism from (Fikri & Wardana, 2019) *emotional escape* and psychological tension. Similarly, the study suggests that the strict separation system in pesantren gives rise to alternative sexual dynamics that are situational and tend to be reversible (Aziz Jayana, 2021).

In addition, economic factors also play a significant role. Students who are involved in such relationships often get a guarantee of daily needs from their seniors, such as food, clothing, and other facilities that are urgently needed at the pesantren. This economic limitation makes some students more vulnerable to engage in such relationships, because they see it as a way to meet basic needs that their families cannot meet, and they often receive attention and material support such as pocket money and daily necessities. In the short sentence, "K" mentions, *"yes later it can be said that the needs are guaranteed."* This indicates that apart from being an emotional escape, such a relationship is also interpreted as a form of relationship that provides a sense of economic and psychological security in the social space of the pesantren. With gender segregation that limits interaction with the opposite sex, same-sex relationships are a

way out for them to get attention and a sense of security, while at the same time meeting their practical needs in a limited pesantren environment.

To understand the complexity of the phenomenon of same-sex attraction in the pesantren environment, it is important to examine the various factors that are interconnected and form the background of these behaviors. This phenomenon does not stand alone, but is born from the interaction between individual psychological conditions, limiting social structures, and environmental dynamics that are less supportive of meeting basic emotional needs. Departing from the results of field observations and relevant literature searches, the following is presented a mapping of factors that contribute to the emergence of this behavior among students. The following table provides a comprehensive overview of the key elements that drive the emergence of same-sex attraction tendencies in the context of pesantren life.

Table 1. Factors Causing Same-Sex Attraction

Factor	Explanation
Limitations of same-sex interaction	Segregation or strict separation between male and female students limits the normal expression of affection towards the opposite sex.
Emptiness of family affection	Lack of affection and attention from parents, for example due to being left behind at work or divorced.
Psychosocial distress Emotional dependence	Strict and rules-filled social environment Close relationships between students that initially turned into an affective or sexual relationship.
Homogeneous social climate	Limited interaction with only the same sex for long periods of time encourages intense emotional closeness.
Lack of psychological support	There is no availability of counseling or psychiatric guidance in the pesantren environment.
Economic factors	Students from underprivileged families find it difficult to access proper mental health and education services.

Therefore, it can be concluded that gender segregation plays a role as the main triggering factor, while other factors aggravate the psychological vulnerability of students. The combination of these factors creates conditions that support the formation of same-sex relationships, which in this context are more appropriately understood as a form of adjustment to emotional distress, rather than simply as deviant behavior.

The developmental psychology approach provides a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of individual self-adjustment in the face of social and emotional demands of the environment. Research by shows that college students who have difficulty

adjusting tend to experience higher levels of stress, indicating a link between self-adjustment skills and individual psychological well-being. This is in line with findings that identify that low self-adjustment contributes to increased anxiety levels in freshmen. In this context, individuals who are unable to adjust to their social environment may seek out adaptive

alternatives that provide a sense of security and acceptance, even if they do not always conform to the prevailing norms. The (Dewi Meliantini et al., 2024; Suharsono & Anwar, 2020) phenomenon of same-sex attraction among students does not always reflect pure sexual urges, but can be seen as an effort to compensate for unmet psychosocial needs. In this regard, the humanistic psychology approach, specifically Maslow's theory of hierarchy of needs, provides a relevant conceptual framework. When the need for security, love, and respect is not met in the family environment or educational institution, individuals tend to seek alternative fulfillment through the interpersonal relationships available in their environment. In Islamic boarding schools, intense interaction between students is often a medium for meeting these needs, even though the expression of affection that arises is not always in line with the prevailing social norms. Thus, same-sex attraction in this context is more appropriately understood as a form of adaptive response to environmental conditions that limits access to normative affection. (Ari Kusumawati et al., 2024; Zulfi Fajriyah et al., 2021).

This phenomenon is also closely related to attachment theory, which states that there is a relationship or relationship between a certain figure and a certain phenomenon, which explains that emotional attachment in childhood has a great influence on the formation of interpersonal relationships in adolescence. When students grow up in families that lack a sense of emotional security, then in a new closed and controlled environment such as pesantren, they tend to develop emotional attachment with same-sex friends that provide a sense of protection and attention. This attachment, if not managed in a healthy way, can turn into affective dependence that then goes beyond the boundaries of social norms.

Solution Approach and Implications of Education in Islamic Boarding Schools

After understanding the dynamics of emotional relationships and the psychosocial background behind the emergence of same-sex attraction in the pesantren environment, it is important to highlight how pesantren institutions respond to this phenomenon. The response not only reflects the normative values adhered to, but also

shows the educational approach applied in dealing with complex and multidimensional problems. Unfortunately, the current approach is still dominated by a repressive perspective, which actually risks worsening the psychological condition of students and failing to touch the real root of the problem.

The response of Islamic boarding schools to this phenomenon still tends to be normative and repressive. Generally, students who are known to have same-sex relationships are subject to punishment or *takziran*, such as reciting while standing, wearing a violating veil, and other physical punishment for days, or even to the stage of summoning their parents. Although some pesantren have begun to provide in-depth guidance, this approach has not yet touched the psychosocial roots of the problem. As reflected in the "P" case, the punitive approach actually has a negative impact on the psychological condition of the students concerned, even triggering the desire to escape from the pesantren environment. In fact, from the perspective of labeling theory or giving nicknames, the giving of social stigma actually strengthens distorted identities and aggravates the process of social isolation experienced by individuals.

These findings show that the phenomenon of homosexuality in Islamic boarding schools cannot be understood simplistic as a moral deviation or the free will of individuals. Instead, this phenomenon is a reflection of identity crisis, psychosocial pressure, and the absence of an adequate emotional support system. Therefore, a follow-up that is multidimensional and solution-oriented is needed. Islamic boarding schools need to develop a holistic psychosocial mentoring program, which combines Islamic values with a psychopedagogical approach.

In addition, sexual education that is contextual and based on the Islamic values of rahmatan lil 'alamin needs to be introduced gradually so that students have a complete understanding of self-identity, social relations, and reproductive health. Training for caregivers and educators in Islamic boarding schools on an empathetic and developmental psychology-based approach is also part of the long-term solution.

However, this study has limitations. The subjectivity of data in qualitative research and the limited scope of location make the generalization of results to all pesantren not fully representative. In addition, the absence of longitudinal data makes it difficult for researchers to trace whether this same-sex attraction behavior continues after students leave the pesantren or is temporary. Therefore, follow-up studies with a research approach that involves observation of the same subjects over a longer *period*

of time (*longitudinal*) and wider site coverage are needed to strengthen these findings and provide a more comprehensive picture of the dynamics of same-sex attraction in the religious education environment.

The findings of this study fundamentally challenge the single approach that has dominated in looking at the phenomenon of students' interest in the same sex in the pesantren environment. In conservative religious discourse, students' same-sex attraction is often positioned solely as a moral deviation that must be straightened out through normative and punitive approaches. However, through a qualitative and exploratory approach, this study reveals a psychosocial landscape that is much more complex than just ethical issues or deviant behavior.

It is important to realize that pesantren is not a completely sterile space from contemporary social problems. In fact, as an educational institution that accommodates teenagers with diverse family backgrounds, pesantren represents a miniature social reality full of inner conflicts, the search for identity, and the psychological struggles of students. It is in this context that various forms of emotional interaction, including same-sex attachment, can emerge as an adaptive mechanism that students use to overcome culture *shock* and emotional difficulties rather than simply a manifestation of sexual orientation itself (Salwa Alya Azzahra et al., 2025).

Conceptually, this phenomenon can be explained through a *sociocultural developmental theory approach* that places identity and behavior as the result of social constructions that develop in the interaction of individuals with their cultural and social environment. In other words, sexual identity is not born in a vacuum, but is formed dynamically through the process of internalizing values, emotional experiences, and structural pressures that individuals experience in a given time. Therefore, homosexual behavior in the pesantren environment must be viewed in a situational and relational framework, not in a rigid essentialist framework.

Furthermore, a queer pedagogy approach in the field of study that examines the essence of sexuality-based normativity. Which offers an alternative perspective opens up space to understand how educational institutions, including Islamic boarding schools, unconsciously create the assumption that the phenomenon of students' attraction to the same sex is normal for the expression of non-mainstream identity. In this framework, instead of shaping adolescents into ideal figures based on Islamic values *rahmatan lil 'alamin*, the education system that is restrained or suppressing actually

causes emotional repression that leads to bad behaviors that are more difficult to control. This does not mean that pesantren must accept or acknowledge the phenomenon of students' interest in the same sex. However, this study shows the urgent urgency to make changes by using an educational approach and character development that is more supportive to students as a whole. An approach that relies only on *takziran* (punishment), no matter how good intentions, has proven not to touch the root of the problem. In fact, in many cases, it reinforces the psychological alienation of students and triggers a repetitive cycle of emotional escape.

The practical implications of this study are quite broad. First, pesantren need to build a sustainable psychosocial assistance system, where the role of ustadz/ustadzah, room chairman, and dormitory administrators is not only as a discipline enforcer, but also as an emotional caregiver. Second, there is a need for contextual and progressive value-based sexuality education, which is not taboo in discussing identity, limitations, and emotional responsibilities from an early age. Third, Islamic boarding schools need to be open to working with professionals such as psychologists, counselors, and educators who have a multidimensional perspective on adolescent development.

More than that, this study emphasizes that building pesantren as a *safe space* for the spiritual, intellectual, and emotional growth of students is the demand of the times. In the midst of an increasingly complex social reality, strengthening Islamic values should go hand in hand with strengthening empathy, psychological understanding, and wisdom in dealing with the diversity of students' life experiences. Without this, pesantren risk becoming institutions that fail to capture the dynamics of the times and answer the challenges of the younger generation.

Finally, the author realizes that this research is not the final answer, but rather an initial invitation for academics, caregivers, and the wider community to more deeply examine the phenomenon of same-sex attraction among Islamic boarding schools in an objective, and empathetic manner. It takes intellectual courage and openness of heart to open discourse, not to legalize deviances, but to heal the social and psychological wounds that have been silenced by fear, stigma, and gaps of understanding.

Conclusion

This study shows that the phenomenon of same-sex attraction in the Islamic boarding school environment is not solely a moral deviation, but an adaptive response

to emotional limitations, psychosocial pressures, repressive social structures and economic factors also play a role in shaping this dynamic. Same-sex attraction that occurs among students is generally situational and develops in the context of similar backgrounds such as lack of affection from family, as well as lack of healthy psychological support mechanisms within Islamic boarding schools.

The intense emotional relationships between students also often transform into affective and physical closeness, reflecting the basic need for a sense of security, acceptance, and love. In such situations, same-sex attraction behavior is more accurately understood as a symptom of an affective crisis and failure to adjust to a repressive environment, rather than as a definitive sexual orientation. The response of pesantren which has tended to be normative and focused on punishment has not touched the root of the problem. Therefore, a more comprehensive approach is needed through the integration of psychosocial assistance, contextual sexuality education, and the involvement of professionals who understand the dynamics of adolescent development.

This, pesantren as an Islamic educational institution is required to be more adaptive and empathetic in responding to the challenges of the times. Islamic character education is not enough to be oriented only to external disciplines, but must also pay attention to the psychological and social aspects that shape the behavior of students. Only with a humane, value-based and scientific approach, pesantren can become a space that can truly educate and heal.

Suggestion

Given the complexity of same-sex attraction in the pesantren environment, it is essential to use a comprehensive strategic approach. Pesantren need to build a psychosocial development framework that is in line with Islamic values that are full of empathy. In addition, appropriate sexual training and education for caregivers regarding adolescent child psychology must be implemented immediately. Cooperation with professionals from various fields is also very necessary, so that pesantren not only function as moral guardians but also become places that support the spiritual and emotional growth of students.

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