A Psychospiritual Model of Emotion Regulation in Pesantren Counseling

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Abstract

Background: Adolescents in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) encounter emotional challenges such as adaptation stress, academic pressure, peer conflict, and withdrawal within structured religious environments. In this context, counselors function as spiritual mentors and facilitators of emotional regulation. **Objective**: This study examines how psychospiritual mechanisms are constructed in pesantren counseling practices and formulates a Psychospiritual Emotion Regulation Model (PERM). **Method**: A qualitative case study was conducted at Pondok Pesantren Sunan Drajat involving five counselors and ten santri who had experienced emotional difficulties. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, and were analyzed using thematic and analytic model construction procedures. **Results**: Findings indicate that emotional triggers activated two interconnected regulatory processes: cognitive reappraisal facilitated through structured counseling techniques and spiritually mediated meaning reconstruction grounded in practices such as taubah, sabr, and muhasabah. These processes operated reciprocally within the institutional ecology, contributing to behavioral adjustment, enhanced emotional awareness, and internalized spiritual meaning. **Conclusion:** The proposed PERM conceptualizes emotion regulation as a dual psychospiritual process embedded in a moral-educational context. Derived from a single-case qualitative inquiry, the model offers a contextually grounded specification of emotion regulation theory for faith-based counseling settings.

Keywords: Cognitive behavioral therapy; emotion regulation; islamic counseling; islamic emotion regulation model; pesantren

Abstrak

Latar Belakang: Remaja di lingkungan pesantren menghadapi berbagai tantangan emosional, seperti stres adaptasi, tekanan akademik, konflik teman sebaya, dan kecenderungan penarikan diri dalam sistem pendidikan religius yang terstruktur. Dalam konteks ini, konselor berperan sebagai pembimbing spiritual sekaligus fasilitator regulasi emosi. **Tujuan**: Penelitian ini menganalisis konstruksi mekanisme psikospiritual dalam praktik konseling pesantren dan merumuskan Psychospiritual Emotion Regulation Model (PERM). **Metode**: Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus di Pondok Pesantren Sunan Drajat, melibatkan lima konselor dan sepuluh santri yang mengalami kesulitan emosional. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan analisis dokumen, kemudian dianalisis secara tematik melalui konstruksi model analitik. **Hasil**: Temuan menunjukkan bahwa pemicu emosional mengaktifkan dua proses regulasi yang saling berinteraksi, yaitu restrukturisasi kognitif melalui teknik konseling terstruktur dan rekonstruksi makna berbasis spiritual melalui praktik taubah, sabr, dan muhasabah. Interaksi keduanya berlangsung dalam ekologi institusional pesantren dan berkontribusi pada penyesuaian perilaku, peningkatan kesadaran emosi, serta internalisasi makna spiritual. **Kesimpulan**: PERM memosisikan regulasi emosi sebagai proses psikospiritual ganda yang terintegrasi dalam konteks moral-edukatif. Model ini bersifat kontekstual dan menawarkan spesifikasi teoritis regulasi emosi dalam layanan konseling berbasis religiusitas.

Kata Kunci: Konseling islami; model regulasi emosi islami; pesantren; regulasi emosi; terapi kognitif perilaku

Introduction

Adolescence represents a critical developmental stage characterized by heightened emotional reactivity, identity formation, and increased sensitivity to social evaluation (Santrock, 2019). Within Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), this developmental phase unfolds in a highly structured religious environment marked by intensive academic schedules, communal living, and moral discipline. While such an environment provides opportunities for spiritual growth and character formation, it may also intensify psychosocial stressors, including homesickness, academic pressure, peer conflict, and adjustment to institutional norms. These stressors frequently manifest in emotional disturbances such as anxiety, irritability, sadness, and social withdrawal (Amri, 2020).

Institutional data from Pondok Pesantren Sunan Drajat Lamongan for the 2024 report approximately 15-20 emotional disturbance cases per semester, with anxiety and homesickness (36%), academic stress (28%), peer conflicts (22%), and emotional withdrawal (14%) as the most prevalent concerns. With approximately 6,879 students served by only five active counselors, the imbalance between demand and counseling capacity underscores the need for a systematic and theoretically grounded model of emotional intervention. Moreover, preliminary observations indicate that emotional difficulties are often interpreted primarily as moral or spiritual deficiencies rather than as regulatory processes requiring structured psychological intervention. Consequently, counseling practices may emphasize general moral advice instead of systematic emotional regulation strategies (Hasanah, 2021).

Existing literature has highlighted the role of Islamic counseling in fostering spiritual balance and character development among santri. Hanapi (2020) emphasizes that counseling grounded in tauhid provides a theological foundation for psychological stability. Hasanah (2021) demonstrates that Islamic counseling strengthens moral discipline and self-regulation, while Nuraeni (2023) integrates dhikr with Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) to enhance emotional intelligence and reduce stress. Peer-based and spiritually oriented interventions have also been shown to improve adjustment and well-being among santri (Ibandiyah & Hasanah, 2021), and Qur'anic psychology programs have demonstrated positive effects on meaning in life and emotional stability (Zunaih et al., 2025). However, these studies primarily emphasize spiritual outcomes without systematically mapping their mechanisms onto established emotion regulation theory.

Gross's (2015) Emotion Regulation Model provides a comprehensive framework describing how individuals influence the trajectory of their emotional responses through processes such as cognitive reappraisal and response modulation. While widely applied within cognitive-behavioral traditions, this model does not explicitly account for spiritually grounded meaning systems that may shape regulatory goals, appraisal patterns, and emotional interpretations in religious contexts. Contemporary research suggests that religion can function as an organized emotion regulation system influencing how emotions are evaluated and managed (Vishkin et al., 2022; Vishkin et al., 2024). Furthermore, meaning-making and religious coping have been identified as significant contributors to adolescent emotional resilience (Park, 2019; Koenig, 2021; Koenig et al., 2023; Park & Blake, 2024). Nevertheless, empirical investigations integrating these perspectives within Islamic boarding school counseling practices remain limited.

Within Indonesian pesantren settings, spirituality functions not merely as belief content but as a regulatory value system embedded in daily rituals, ethical norms, and interpersonal relationships (Amri, 2020; Hasanah & Haris, 2023). Yet, no empirical study has systematically formulated an integrative counseling model that analytically connects emotion regulation theory with Islamic spiritual constructs, such as *taubah, sabr, muhasabah*, and *tazkiyatun nafs*, from the institutional perspective of pesantren counselors. Suhertina (2025), in a systematic literature review, underscores the effectiveness of Islamic-based counseling for student well-being while highlighting the scarcity of empirically grounded models integrating spiritual values with psychological regulation mechanisms in specific educational contexts.

Addressing this gap, the present study develops a psychospiritual model of emotion regulation grounded in counseling practices at Pondok Pesantren Sunan Drajat Lamongan. Rather than positioning spirituality as merely supplementary coping content, this study conceptualizes it as a value-based interpretive framework that shapes emotional appraisal and regulatory processes. By examining how counselors integrate cognitive-behavioral techniques with spiritually mediated meaning reconstruction, this research seeks to provide a contextual specification of emotion regulation theory within a faith-based educational ecology.

Specifically, this study aims to: (1) interpret emotional triggers as regulatory antecedents among santri; (2) analyze the integration of psychological and spiritual strategies in pesantren counseling; and (3) formulate the Psychospiritual Emotion Regulation Model (PERM) as a contextually grounded framework.

Through this contribution, the study advances culturally embedded extensions of emotion regulation theory and provides a theoretically informed foundation for psychospiritual counseling practices in Islamic educational institutions.

Method

Research Design. This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore how emotion regulation processes are constructed within pesantren counseling practices. A case study approach is appropriate when investigating complex phenomena embedded in real-life institutional contexts where boundaries between phenomenon and setting are intertwined (Yin, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The bounded system examined was Pondok Pesantren Sunan Drajat Lamongan, enabling in-depth analysis of counseling interactions, spiritual practices, and regulatory processes within a single institutional ecology. The unit of analysis focused on counseling practices and regulatory mechanisms as articulated by counselors and experienced by santri.

The study was conducted at Pondok Pesantren Sunan Drajat Lamongan, one of the largest Islamic boarding schools in East Java, Indonesia, hosting approximately 6.879 students across junior secondary, senior secondary, and tertiary levels. The pesantren maintains a formal counseling unit responsible for addressing students' emotional and spiritual concerns. The setting was selected due to its structured counseling system and the presence of trained counselors implementing integrative approaches.

Participants

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to obtain information-rich cases relevant to the research objectives (Patton, 2015). The study involved: Five pesantren counselors with at least one year of active counseling experience; Ten santri who had undergone counseling for emotional difficulties (e.g., anxiety, stress, social withdrawal); Three administrators (*ustadz*) involved in supervising student well-being. These participants provided complementary perspectives on emotional identification, counseling processes, and institutional practices.

Data were collected through triangulated methods: (1) In-depth semi-structured interviews with counselors, santri, and administrators (45-60 minutes each), focusing on emotional problem identification, intervention strategies, and integration of spiritual values. Interviews were audio-recorded with consent. (2) Participant observation during counseling sessions, halaqah reflections, and selected communal religious activities to capture interactional dynamics and observable emotional regulation behaviors. (3) Document analysis, including counseling records, case notes, and student reflection journals, to corroborate interview and observational data. Interview guides and observation protocols were developed based on the study objectives and reviewed by two experts in Islamic counseling and qualitative methodology.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2018), involving data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Initial coding identified categories related to emotional triggers, regulatory strategies, spiritual practices, and counseling techniques. These categories were then analytically integrated to examine how cognitive-behavioral mechanisms and spiritual constructs interacted within counseling sessions. Through iterative comparison and conceptual abstraction, thematic relationships were synthesized into a contextual framework, culminating in the formulation of the Psychospiritual Emotion Regulation Model (PERM). This process moved beyond descriptive thematization toward analytic model construction grounded in empirical patterns.

Trustworthiness To ensure qualitative rigor (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), several strategies were applied: (1) Triangulation across participants and data sources; (2) Member checking to confirm interpretive accuracy; (3) Peer debriefing to review coding consistency and thematic coherence; (4) Maintenance of an audit trail documenting analytical decisions. These procedures enhanced credibility, dependability, and confirmability.

Ethical Considerations. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Participants were assured of confidentiality and their right to withdraw at any time. Pseudonyms were used in transcripts and reporting. Institutional approval was granted by the leadership of Pondok Pesantren Sunan Drajat Lamongan. The study did not receive external funding.

Result

3.1 Emotional Triggers as Regulatory Antecedents

Analysis of interviews, observations, and counseling documentation identified four dominant emotional patterns among santri: anxiety and homesickness, academic stress, peer conflicts, and emotional withdrawal. Anxiety and separation distress were most frequently reported among students in their early years of boarding life, particularly during transitional phases of adaptation.

Participants described emotional reactions such as restlessness, insomnia, sadness, and decreased learning motivation.

"I often feel sad and miss my parents, especially during weekends." (Santri A)

Counselors noted that academic expectations and disciplinary structures often intensified emotional pressure. Emotional distress was frequently interpreted by santri as a sign of moral weakness rather than as a psychological regulatory challenge.

"They perceive failure as a spiritual weakness, not a psychological challenge." (Counselor 2)

These findings indicate that emotional difficulties functioned as antecedent triggers that activated regulatory processes within counseling interactions.

3.2 Dual Regulatory Mechanisms: Cognitive and Spiritual Processes

The analysis revealed that counseling practices operated through two interconnected regulatory mechanisms: cognitive restructuring and spiritually mediated meaning reconstruction.

Cognitive Reappraisal Processes. Counselors adapted Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Reality Therapy techniques to help santri identify maladaptive thoughts, assume behavioral responsibility, and reframe stress-inducing situations. Cognitive reframing was frequently aligned with Islamic concepts such as *husnuzan billah* (positive assumptions about God), enabling santri to reinterpret difficulties constructively. "We guide them to reinterpret their emotions as part of faith challenges." (Counselor 2). Reality-based strategies included reflective journaling, behavioral goal-setting, and accountability dialogues. These techniques facilitated structured reappraisal consistent with emotion regulation mechanisms described in psychological theory.

Spiritual Purification as Value-Based Appraisal. Beyond cognitive techniques, counselors employed spiritually grounded practices that functioned as interpretive frameworks shaping emotional meaning. The core constructs identified were: Taubah (repentance), encouraging introspection and accountability; Sabr (patience), fostering endurance under stress; Muhasabah (self-reflection), enhancing awareness of emotional triggers; Tazkiyatun nafs (self-purification), strengthening discipline through ritual practices; Qur'anic verses and prophetic traditions were frequently used to contextualize emotional experiences within a faith-based worldview. "Sadness is part of being human. What matters is responding with patience and reflection." (Counselor 3). These practices shaped how emotions were appraised, not merely how they were expressed, indicating that spiritual constructs functioned as regulatory meaning systems rather than supplementary coping tools.

3.3 Institutional Regulatory Ecology

The pesantren environment reinforced both cognitive and spiritual mechanisms through structured routines and communal practices. Counseling was embedded within a broader moral-educational system characterized by: *nasihat bil hikmah* (wise counsel), moral modeling by teachers, halaqah-based collective reflection, daily spiritual routines such as dzikir and Qur'an recitation. This environment created a regulatory ecology in which emotional discipline was socially reinforced and repeatedly practiced.

3.4 Integrated Regulatory Outcomes

Across cases, counseling participation was associated with observable changes in three interrelated domains: (1) Behavioral Adjustment. Santri demonstrated reduced irritability, improved participation in communal activities, and more constructive conflict resolution. (2) Emotional Regulation Capacity. Participants showed increased awareness of emotional triggers, greater ability to pause before reacting, and improved use of cognitive and spiritual coping strategies. (3) Spiritual Meaning Internalization. Santri increasingly articulated emotional challenges in terms of patience, gratitude, and moral growth.

"Now I try to breathe, do dzikir, and think again before reacting." (Santri F)

These outcomes suggest that emotional change occurred through the interaction of cognitive restructuring and spiritually mediated reappraisal rather than through isolated psychological techniques.

3.5 Empirical Construction of the Psychospiritual Model

Synthesizing these findings, the data reveal a patterned regulatory sequence consisting of: emotional triggers (adaptation stress, academic pressure, interpersonal conflict); cognitive reappraisal processes facilitated through structured counseling techniques; spiritually grounded meaning reconstruction through practices of taubah, sabr, muhasabah, and tazkiyatun nafs; integrated outcomes reflected in behavioral adjustment, emotional balance, and internalized spiritual meaning.

The interaction among these components constitutes the empirical foundation of the proposed Psychospiritual Model of Emotion Regulation in Pesantren Counseling. Within this model, cognitive and spiritual processes operate reciprocally within an institutional context that sustains and reinforces regulatory development.
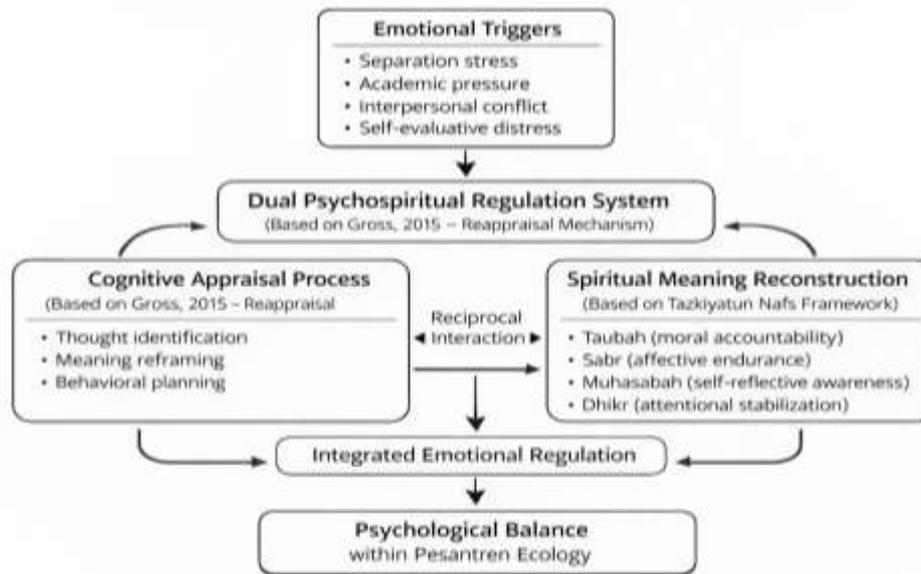

Figure 1. Psychospiritual Emotion Regulation Model (PERM) in pesantren counseling context

Figure 1 illustrates the Psychospiritual Emotion Regulation Model (PERM) derived from the empirical findings of this study. The model conceptualizes emotion regulation as a dual-process system activated by emotional triggers within the pesantren context. Cognitive appraisal processes, grounded in reappraisal mechanisms, interact reciprocally with spiritually mediated meaning reconstruction rooted in tazkiyatun nafs practices. These parallel processes converge into integrated emotional regulation, leading to psychological balance reinforced within the institutional ecology. The model emphasizes reciprocal interaction rather than hierarchical dominance between cognitive and spiritual mechanisms.

Discussion

This study conceptualized emotion regulation within pesantren counseling as a psychospiritual regulatory system embedded in a moral-educational ecology. Rather than treating spirituality as supplementary coping content, the findings indicate that spiritual constructs function as value-based appraisal frameworks shaping how emotional triggers are interpreted and managed.

The emotional patterns identified, adaptation stress, academic pressure, peer conflict, and withdrawal, reflect vulnerabilities commonly associated with adolescence (Compas et al., 2021; Ford & Gross, 2024). Developmental models emphasize that regulatory capacity during adolescence is still consolidating and highly sensitive to contextual expectations (Eisenberg et al., 2020). In pesantren settings, however, emotional experiences are not processed in psychologically neutral space. They are filtered through moral-religious expectations that frame distress as potential spiritual inadequacy.

This moral filtering mechanism extends existing regulatory theory by demonstrating that antecedent appraisal is shaped not only by cognitive evaluation but also by internalized value systems. Religion, in this context, operates as a structured interpretive matrix influencing regulatory goals (Vishkin et al., 2024; Koenig et al., 2023).

Counselors employed structured techniques derived from Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and Reality Therapy to facilitate maladaptive thought identification and behavioral accountability. Contemporary emotion regulation scholarship identifies cognitive reappraisal as a central antecedent-focused mechanism influencing emotional trajectories (Ford & Gross, 2024; Troy et al., 2023).

However, in this study, reappraisal was not value-neutral. It was explicitly aligned with Islamic concepts such as husnuzan billah (positive assumptions about God), thereby embedding cognitive restructuring within theological meaning systems. This finding aligns with research demonstrating that culturally adapted CBT enhances therapeutic resonance when integrated with clients' religious worldviews (Rosmarin & Pirutinsky, 2020).

Thus, PERM extends cognitive reappraisal theory by illustrating how appraisal modification may be co-constructed with transcendental meaning frameworks rather than solely through secular cognitive reframing.

Spiritual constructs such as taubah, sabr, and muhasabah functioned not merely as ritual practices but as structured interpretive schemas guiding emotional evaluation. Religious coping research conceptualizes spirituality as a meaning-making system influencing appraisal, perceived control, and resilience (Pargament, 2020; Park & Blake, 2024).

Empirical studies in Muslim adolescent populations demonstrate that religious coping and spiritual maturity correlate with emotional stability (Yusuf & Nurkholis, 2021) and stress reduction through dhikr-based practices (Fitriyah & Nursalim, 2022). The present findings extend these observations by situating such mechanisms within formal counseling interactions rather than informal devotional contexts.

In PERM, spiritual purification (*tazkiyatun nafs*) operates as a value-mediated reappraisal system that reshapes emotional goals, from distress reduction toward moral growth and divine alignment. This reframing suggests that regulatory success is defined not only by emotional modulation but by congruence with transcendental values.

Emotion regulation does not occur in isolation but within social and institutional scaffolding (Eisenberg et al., 2020). The pesantren context functioned as a regulatory ecology where communal rituals, halaqah reflection, and moral modeling reinforced both cognitive and spiritual regulatory processes.

Cultural counseling research emphasizes that interventions embedded in local moral-educational systems enhance contextual coherence and internalization (Rahman, 2022). In this case, the institutional structure sustained repeated regulatory rehearsal, transforming isolated coping strategies into habitualized emotional discipline. This finding positions PERM not merely as an individual-level mechanism but as an ecological regulatory system.

Gross's extended process model conceptualizes regulation as a sequence involving situation selection, attention deployment, cognitive change, and response modulation (Ford & Gross, 2024). While comprehensive, it remains largely value-neutral.

The present study contributes a contextual specification by demonstrating that regulatory appraisal and goal formation may be structurally shaped by spiritual meaning systems. Religion, therefore, may operate not simply as coping content but as an organizing regulatory architecture (Vishkin et al., 2024).

PERM proposes that: Emotional triggers are filtered through moral-religious schemas. Cognitive reappraisal and spiritual meaning reconstruction operate reciprocally. Regulatory outcomes include behavioral adjustment, emotional balance, and internalized spiritual alignment. Institutional ecology reinforces regulatory consolidation.

Importantly, as a single-case qualitative inquiry, this model is conceptual rather than universally generalizable. It offers a theoretically grounded framework for further empirical validation in multi-site, longitudinal, or mixed-method designs.

Conclusion

This study conceptualizes a Psychospiritual Emotion Regulation Model (PERM) grounded in qualitative findings from pesantren counseling practice. The model portrays emotional regulation as a dual-process system in which cognitive reappraisal mechanisms interact reciprocally with spiritually mediated meaning reconstruction rooted in Islamic practices. Within the pesantren ecology, this interaction appears to facilitate emotional modulation, behavioral adjustment, and the development of spiritual resilience among santri. Rather than positioning the model as universally generalizable, the findings should be understood as contextually derived from a single institutional case. The qualitative design limits causal inference and does not permit statistical claims regarding effectiveness. Future research employing multi-site designs, quantitative validation, and longitudinal approaches is necessary to examine the structural stability, developmental trajectory, and broader applicability of the model across diverse Islamic educational contexts. The study contributes to contemporary emotion regulation scholarship by illustrating how regulatory processes may be shaped by value-based spiritual systems within culturally embedded settings. It offers a theoretically informed framework for further empirical refinement in faith-based psychological research.

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