



# The Impact of a Peer-Led Islamic Moderation Program on Mental Well-being and Violent Extremism Prevention among Indonesian Students

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Track Record Article	Abstract
<p>Revised: 18 July 2025 Accepted: 20 August 2025 Published: 30 September 2025</p> <p><b>How to cite:</b> Budiman, B., Siregar, A. H., Nuzlan, D. N. R., Apriliani, A., Siregar, P. A., Rezebri, M., &amp; Zebua, C. (2025). The Impact of a Peer-Led Islamic Moderation Program on Mental Well-being and Violent Extremism Prevention among Indonesian Students. <i>Contagion: Scientific Periodical Journal of Public Health and Coastal Health</i>, 7(2), 500–509.</p>	<p><i>Introduction: Violent extremism among students is a problem that must be addressed, and religious moderation programs are expected to be one effective intervention in improving psychological resilience. This study aims to evaluate the impact of religious moderation education on enhancing religious moderation among university students, with a focus on changes in national commitment, religious knowledge, tolerance, and anti-violent understanding. Method: This study employed a quantitative approach with a single-group pretest-posttest design and was conducted in a province in Indonesia from June to November 2024. The research participants consisted of 39 students involved in a religious moderation education intervention program. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire focusing on four main indicators of religious moderation. The data were then analyzed using a paired sample t-test with JASP version 19. Results: Findings showed a statistically significant increase in all variables after the intervention. National commitment increased from 27.15 to 31.82 (<math>p &lt; 0.001</math>); religious knowledge from 30.33 to 31.95 (<math>p = 0.008</math>); tolerance from 32.69 to 34.10 (<math>p = 0.032</math>); and understanding of anti-violence from 34.10 to 35.79 (<math>p = 0.020</math>). Conclusion: Structured religious moderation education can enhance students' religious moderation by integrating Islamic identity and national responsibility.</i></p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> <i>Religious Moderation; Psychological Resilience; Islamic Education; Extremism; Mental Health</i></p>

## INTRODUCTION

Violent extremism is a serious public health issue that transcends the security framework and has a major impact on the mental health of the community and social cohesion (Yusof, 2019). The World Health Organization (WHO) provides a broader definition of health as complete physical, mental, and social well-being, placing radicalization as a process in which individuals adopt extremist ideologies that justify violence as a major determinant of psychological disorders at the population level and community fragmentation. Indonesia, as one of the countries with the largest Muslim population in the world, has seen the emergence of extremist movements among students, triggering urgent public health demands. There has been a spread of radical ideology among millennial students through campus organizations with exclusive and secret groups and exclusive religious activities, which has led to bombings, attacks on places of worship, and violent disturbances against religious services in several provinces in Indonesia (Karnedi,

2023) (Zakiyah, 2023).

North Sumatra province has also experienced extremist incidents such as the burning of Vihara and Klenteng in Tanjung Balai in 2016, a bomb explosion in Sibolga in 2019, and an attack on the Medan Police Headquarters by a student, highlighting the immediate public health consequences of radicalization, including exposure to trauma, death, and community disintegration (Yudin, 2025). These incidents illustrate how religious extremism emerges as a vector of violence, disproportionately affecting young people in a group that is already vulnerable to mental health challenges and susceptible to ideologies that offer a false sense of belonging and purpose when psychological needs are unmet (Yusof, 2019).

The Indonesian government has responded to radicalization in Indonesia by strengthening religious moderation as a prevention strategy, which is realized through national policies that place moderate Islam as an important element in combating extremism in higher education (Zuhri, 2023; Lessy, 2022). Islamic universities have integrated the values of moderation, including *tawassuth* (moderation), *tawazun* (balance), *tasamuh* (tolerance), and *i'tidal* (justice), into their curricula and extracurricular activities, with the aim of creating students as agents against radicalism (Mustakim, 2021; A. N. Aziz, 2023). Institutions such as UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang require new students to live in campus dormitories, ensuring early exposure to moderate Islamic knowledge (Mubarak, 2022). Religious universities in several places have created the SMART Campus framework, which stands for Spiritual, Moderate, Academic, Responsive, and Tolerant. The SMART Campus is expected to reflect a structured institutional commitment to shaping a balanced religious identity (A. Aziz, 2023). This effort aligns with the Ministry of Religious Affairs' four indicators of religious moderation: national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and cultural accommodation (Kementarian Agama RI, 2019; Nasution, 2022). There are still many challenges in implementing religious moderation programs; approaches are not standardized, systematic studies of long-term impacts remain limited, and teacher readiness varies significantly (Prasetyo, 2025). Institutional policies risk remaining merely textual rather than being deeply internalized into campus culture, which can lead to performative compliance rather than genuine commitment (Suwanto, 2023).

The intervention program is designed to address mental well-being and prevent violent extremism through culturally appropriate mechanisms. The specific role of youth-led Islamic moderation programs in building psychological resilience while countering radicalization has yet to be explored. This gap is particularly significant given the documented psychological vulnerabilities, unmet mental health needs, lack of purpose, and

social alienation that make students susceptible to extremist recruitment (Yusof et al. 2019). Islamic extremist organizations actively target the university population through intellectual indoctrination, making higher education a place of radicalization and counter-radicalization (Nasih, 2021; A. N. Aziz, 2023).

The broaden-and-build theory suggests that positive emotions such as gratitude broaden the repertoire of thoughts and actions, facilitating adaptive coping, yet empirical examination of how Islamic moderation programs utilize these psychological processes within Indonesia's unique cultural and religious landscape remains lacking. The integration of Islamic spiritual concepts of *sabr* (patience), *tawakkul* (trust in Allah), *shukr* (gratitude), and *dhikr* (remembrance) with evidence-based psychological interventions represents an under-explored field in culturally sensitive mental health care (Anli, 2025; Ariff, 202 C.E.). Educators and policymakers who implement culturally appropriate interventions in diverse religious contexts will be able to meet the urgent need for empirically supported strategies to improve mental health and social cohesion among Indonesian youth (Wardani, 2022).

## **METHODS**

### **Study Design and Administration**

This investigation aims to evaluate the influence of Islamic education, depression, and religiosity on religious moderation among students at a senior high school. The study utilized a cross-sectional design to recruit participants who expressed willingness to engage in the research. The investigation was conducted from June 2024 to November 2024 in North Sumatra Province.

### **Participants**

This investigation aims to evaluate the influence of Islamic education, depression, and religiosity on religious moderation among students at state Islamic universities. The study utilized a cross-sectional design to recruit voluntary participants. The research was conducted from June 2024 to November 2024 in North Sumatra Province.

### **Measure**

In this investigation, religious moderation serves as the dependent variable. There are three questions regarding religious matters, namely concerning the participant's engagement with Islamic subjects through radio, television, the internet, newspapers, or literature in the past 30 days. Religious ideology comprises closed-ended questions in the questionnaire, with 0 indicating disbelief, 1 indicating belief, and 2 indicating strong belief. The ideology-related questionnaire will include queries about the participant's belief in the

existence of Allah, the Islamic notion of a hereafter, and the infinite grandeur of Allah. Religious worship consists of closed-ended questions in a questionnaire, with a minimum value of 0 ('never') and a maximum value of 1 ('ever'). There are six queries about religious worship, including the participant's daily involvement in practices such as recitation, almsgiving, congregational prayer at the mosque, and sunnah fasting. Religious experiences are quantified in the questionnaire using closed-ended questions, where 0 indicates 'never,' 1 'sometimes,' and 2 'always.' The questionnaire on religious experiences will include questions about the participant's views on communicating with Allah, engaging in activities inspired by Allah, and integrating Allah into all pursuits. Religious studies inquiries consist of closed-ended questions in a questionnaire, with a 0 (never), 1 (sometimes), and 2 (always) scoring system. The questionnaire pertains to the participant's engagement in religious study. Religious moderation encompasses closed-ended questions in a survey addressing anti-violence, tolerance, national allegiance, and the acceptance of local knowledge. Each item will be accompanied by a question with the response options: strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree.

### Data Analysis

This study will use univariate, bivariate, and multivariate methods to investigate the link between independent factors (Islamic religious education, depression, and religiosity) and a dependent variable (religious moderation). Univariate analyses will provide distributions and percentages related to Islamic religious education, depression, religiosity, and religious moderation. An attempt will be made to use multivariate analyses to identify the variables that are significant in predicting religious moderation among Muslim students in Islamic universities. The researcher intends to use JASP (version 19) to analyze multivariate data using linear regression and to construct 95% confidence intervals.

## RESULTS

**Table 1. Distribution of Nationalist Commitment, Religious Knowledge, Tolerance, and Understanding of Non-Violence**

Variable	Minimum	Maximum
National Commitment	25	40
Religious Knowledge	25	40
Tolerance	25	40
Understanding of Non-Violence	25	40

This table shows that each variable exhibits a minimum score of 25 and a maximum score of 40, indicating a uniform scoring range. This consistency suggests that the scoring

framework was standardized across variables to ensure comparable evaluation of participants' responses.

**Table 2. The Effect of Religious Moderation Education on Students' National Commitment, Religious Knowledge, Tolerance, and Understanding of Non-Violence**

Variable (N=39)	Pretest (Mean)	Posttest (Mean)	<i>p</i>
National Commitment	27.15	31.82	<0.001
Religious Knowledge	30.33	31.95	0.008
Tolerance	32.69	34.1	0.032
Understanding of Non-Violence	34.1	35.79	0.02

The results indicate significant improvements across all measured variables following the intervention. For National Commitment, the mean score increased from 27.15 in the pretest to 31.82 in the posttest ( $P < 0.001$ ), reflecting a notable enhancement. Similarly, Religious Knowledge showed a statistically significant rise from a mean of 30.33 to 31.95 ( $P = 0.008$ ). Tolerance also improved, with the mean score increasing from 32.69 to 34.10 ( $P = 0.032$ ). Lastly, Understanding of Non-Violence demonstrated a significant progression, with the mean score rising from 34.10 to 35.79 ( $P = 0.020$ ). These findings suggest that the intervention was effective in enhancing participants' levels of national commitment, religious knowledge, tolerance, and understanding of non-violence, as evidenced by the statistically significant changes across all variables.

## DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate a significant shift in students' ideological orientation, particularly a significant increase in National Commitment and Religious Knowledge after the intervention ( $P < 0.05$ ). The integration of Islamic moderation education does not diminish religious identity; rather, it can enhance it by integrating a sense of responsibility in society, thereby reducing the “exclusive religious mindset” previously identified as a threat among Indonesian youth (Yahya, 2021). The integration of religious values and religious moderation can be implemented in university education to transform students from passive recipients of knowledge into active participants in social harmony (Mustakim, 2021).

Character building and institutional guidance are expected to improve religious understanding and enhance nationalism as opposed to extremist thinking (Nasih, 2021). The government of Indonesia has implemented a policy of religious moderation in response to rising extremism in educational environments (Saifuddin, 2025; Lessy, 2022). This strengthening has had a positive impact on critical public health measures by strengthening the social framework.

An informative and in-depth understanding of belief systems will serve as an

intellectual antidote to radicalization. Students need a good understanding to recognize and counter extremist discourse spread by hidden counter-narrative groups on the internet and in classrooms (Inayatillah, 2022; Karnedi, 2023). The main objective of improving students' understanding of beliefs is to strengthen the normative view of Islam, thereby reducing psychosocial vulnerability associated with involvement in violent extremism and creating a better overall sense of psychosocial well-being (Mustakim, 2021; Rozikan, 2024).

A significant increase in tolerance and understanding of non-violence (an average increase from 32.69 to 34.10 and from 34.10 to 35.79, respectively) demonstrates the program's ability to change students' social cognitive frameworks. The interventions provided led to improved social health, enabling individuals to adapt to diverse cultural environments without conflict. Peer education reinforcement interventions can fill gaps in higher education by fostering appreciation for different religions (Nasih, 2021; Mustakim, 2021).

'Broad-and-build' in psychology indicates that positive attributes such as patience (positive) strengthen an individual's cognitive and behavioral repertoire, thereby enhancing overall well-being. When combined with moderation, the Islamic value of gratitude (shukr) appears to act as a protective effect, potentially increasing positive psychological outcomes and reducing the appeal of extremist narratives (Sholichatun, 2023; Hapsari, 2021). Spirituality is reflected in the resilience of at-risk student groups and is effective in reducing psychological distress (Daulay, 2022).

The effectiveness of this peer-led approach is consistent with research on peer counseling from an Islamic perspective, which finds that visible role models help students understand complex ethical concepts (Istati, 2020; Nahar, 2025). More peer leaders will promote a sense of community and "social interest", fundamental components of a mentally healthy student body (Dechesne, 2021; Hisham, 2022). Culturally tailored interventions will ensure that students view them as an extension of their religious and social values, rather than as an imposition from outside their community (Daliman, 2021).

The integration of the Islamic Personality Model into public health programs for Muslim youth is highly beneficial. This particularly strengthens the protection of the nafs (self) in its spiritual, psychosocial, and physical aspects, going beyond merely alleviating symptoms to fully restoring balance in the 'aql (mind) and rūḥ (spirit) (Ariff, 202 C.E.; Sikander, 2025). This perspective is crucial for increasing opportunities to develop interventions that combine cognitive-behavioral techniques and spiritual elements, thus offering an alternative to the more culturally appropriate Western-oriented mental health paradigm (Aprilianti, 2024; Budiman, 2025).

Mental health and management of social stressors rest on the spiritual values of *sabr* (patience), *tawakkul* (trust in Allah), and *muhasabah* (self-reflection) (Anli, 2025; Ariff, 2023 C.E.). These core values enable students to utilize their cognitive and emotional energy effectively, thereby enhancing their overall resilience and ethical development (Fitria, 2023; Ibrahim, 2024). The integration of these principles into the public health framework strengthens community resilience to extremism by fostering a deep sense of satisfaction and moral clarity (Yuliatun, 2022; Hassan, 2025).

Spiritual excellence and religious moderation are inseparable from psychological well-being. Linking traditional religious wisdom with contemporary psychological insights, this program offers a scalable and effective model for preventing radicalization (Ponidi, 2024; Anli, 2025). Future cohort studies should focus on the sustainable impact of these interventions on civic behavior and career paths, ensuring that the 'psychospiritual resources' of Indonesian youth are fully utilized for national and global harmony (Mohamad, 2025).

## CONCLUSIONS

Structured religious moderation education interventions have been proven to significantly increase students' national commitment and religious knowledge. The internalization of moderation values does not reduce Islamic identity but rather harmoniously integrates it with civic responsibility, thereby effectively reducing exclusive religious mindsets. Religious moderation education interventions have succeeded in strengthening students' cognitive-social frameworks, as reflected in significant improvements in tolerance and understanding of anti-violence. Religiously moderated interventions effectively foster 'prosocial health,' enabling students to live side by side peacefully in a multicultural environment.

Positive emotions and attitudes evoked through Islamic moderation values (such as *tasamuh*/tolerance) function as protective mechanisms that expand an individual's thought-action repertoire, thereby increasing psychological resilience and reducing the appeal of extremist narratives. The relevance of the Islamic Personality Model in public health interventions, where the holistic strengthening of the spiritual (*ruh*), cognitive (*'aql*), and social (*nafs*) dimensions has proven to be the foundation for shaping a moderate and resilient personality.

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