International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities
Vol. 4 No. 2, Juni 2026, pages: 541-555
e-ISSN: 2985-6469
https://ejournal.45mataram.ac.id/index.php/ijssh

Negotiating Religious Values and Relational Needs: The Dynamics of Dating Decision-Making among Islamic Boarding School Students

Faliha Muthmainah[1]*, **Nurul Adila Alfatiha**[2] Corresponding
Author's e-mail : *faliha.muthmainah.fpsi@um.ac.id*

Article History

Manuscript submitted:
21 April 2026
Manuscript revised:
03 Mei 2026
Accepted for publication:
19 Juni 2026

Keywords

Boarding School Students, Decision-Making, Romantic Relationships, Religious Values, Relational Needs, Phenomenology.

Abstract

Dating is generally considered inconsistent with the values and regulations upheld in Islamic boarding schools. Nevertheless, some students choose to engage in romantic relationships despite being aware of these restrictions. This study aimed to explore the dynamics of dating decision-making among Islamic boarding school students within the context of negotiating religious values and relational needs. A phenomenological approach was employed involving six adolescents aged 16–17 years who were currently or had previously been involved in dating relationships. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and observations and were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. The findings revealed that dating decisions emerged through a complex negotiation process involving religious beliefs, relational needs, personal experiences, and social influences. The need for affection, emotional support, and interpersonal closeness encouraged students to pursue romantic relationships, while religious values and boarding school regulations generated ongoing psychological conflicts. Peer influence, family background, social media exposure, and previous romantic experiences also shaped how students interpreted and maintained their decisions. These findings suggest that dating among Islamic boarding school students was not merely an act of norm violation but rather the result of a dynamic decision-making process in response to competing value systems and developmental needs during adolescence.

Copyright © 2025, The Author(s).
This is an open access article under the BY-NC-ND license

Contents

Abstract 541
Introduction 542
Methods 544
Results and Discussions 545
Conclusion 552
Reference 552

[1] State University of Malang, Indonesia
[2] State University of Malang, Indonesia

Introduction

Adolescence is a developmental period characterized by biological, cognitive, social, and emotional changes that encourage individuals to establish closer interpersonal relationships with members of the opposite sex (Santrock, 2011; Sulhan, 2024). One of the most common forms of relationships that emerge during this developmental stage is romantic dating. For many adolescents, dating serves as a means of fulfilling their need for affection, obtaining emotional support, developing personal identity, and learning interpersonal relationship skills. Therefore, interest in romantic relationships constitutes an integral part of adolescent developmental dynamics.

On the other hand, dating relationships are not always viewed positively across all social and cultural contexts. Within Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), interactions between male and female students (*santri*) are generally regulated strictly based on religious values and institutional rules (Dakir & Anwar, 2020). Many *pesantren* prohibit dating as an effort to ensure that students' behavior aligns with religious norms, enhance their focus on learning and worship activities, and prevent behaviors considered inconsistent with Islamic teachings. This condition creates a unique situation in which *santri*, as adolescents, experience developmental needs similar to those of their peers in general, yet reside in an environment that restricts the expression of romantic relationships.

Nevertheless, dating among *santri* continues to occur in various forms (Yulika & Setiawan, 2017; Tempo.co, September 22, 2015; Rahmatullah & Purnomo, 2020). In addition, the researcher conducted a survey involving 18 current and former *santri* from a *pesantren* in Bogor, which revealed that 12 participants had been or were currently involved in a romantic relationship. One participant explained that the motivation for dating stemmed from a need for a close companion who shared similar hobbies and interests. The participant also perceived dating as a form of escape from an unwillingness to attend a *pesantren*. The existence of this phenomenon suggests that decisions to engage in romantic relationships are influenced not only by prevailing rules but also by various psychological, social, and personal experiential factors. In this context, *santri* face a complex situation in which the need for emotional intimacy and romantic involvement interacts with the religious values they understand and embrace. Such circumstances may generate distinctive considerations, conflicts, and negotiation processes in decision-making.

Decision-making is a process that involves evaluating various alternatives, weighing potential benefits and risks, and aligning choices with an individual's values and goals (Syamsi, 2000; Lunenburg, 2010). In the context of romantic relationships within *pesantren*, this process becomes particularly interesting to examine because the decisions involved are not merely related to personal preferences but also encompass religious norms, institutional regulations, family influences, peer influences, and previous relational experiences. Consequently, dating decisions among *santri* cannot be understood as isolated behaviors but rather as outcomes of complex psychological processes.

Numerous studies have examined adolescent romantic relationships from various perspectives. Some have focused on the effects of dating on adolescents' psychological development and behavior (Sari, 20; Harahap, 2023), while others have explored the relationship between religiosity and dating behavior (Saputri, 2022; Soliah, 2023). Although these studies have contributed to understanding factors associated with adolescent romantic relationships, most have concentrated on the consequences of dating behavior or individuals' levels of religiosity. Research specifically exploring adolescents' decision-making processes in initiating romantic relationships, particularly within environments

characterized by strong religious values and institutional regulations such as *pesantren*, remains relatively limited.

Furthermore, previous studies have predominantly employed quantitative approaches and therefore have provided limited insight into adolescents' subjective experiences in navigating conflicts between relational needs and religious expectations. For *santri*, the decision to engage in dating involves not only attraction to the opposite sex but also a complex process of balancing religious beliefs, *pesantren* regulations, emotional needs, and social environmental influences. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by employing an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the dynamics underlying dating decision-making among *santri* based on their lived experiences. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on the decision-making processes involved in dating among *santri* and its use of an interpretative phenomenological approach to explore how *santri* negotiate their relational needs with the religious values they uphold.

Decision-making is a cognitive process that involves identifying a problem, considering various alternative courses of action, evaluating potential consequences, and selecting the option that is perceived as most consistent with an individual's goals and values (Lunenburg, 2010). In the context of romantic relationships, the decision to initiate or maintain a relationship is influenced not only by rational considerations but also by emotional, social, and personal values held by the individual. One model that explains this process is the Rational Decision-Making Model, which conceptualizes decision-making as a systematic process consisting of several stages: recognizing a need or problem, identifying available alternatives, evaluating the advantages and disadvantages of each alternative, selecting the option considered most beneficial, and assessing the outcomes of the decision that has been made (Lunenburg, 2010). In the context of *santri*, the decision to engage in dating can be understood as the result of balancing the need for affection and emotional support against the risks associated with religious prohibitions and *pesantren* regulations.

However, decision-making does not always occur in a purely rational manner. Scharding (2023) and F. Xiao (2023), through the Conflict Theory of Decision Making, explain that individuals often experience psychological conflict when choosing between alternatives that each carry both positive and negative consequences. Such conflicts may generate doubt, anxiety, and various forms of psychological adjustment before a decision is reached. Among *santri*, this condition becomes evident when they recognize that dating conflicts with the religious values they uphold, while at the same time perceiving romantic relationships as capable of fulfilling important emotional and relational needs during adolescence. This situation creates a dilemma that requires negotiation between religious values and developmental needs.

In addition, the Naturalistic Decision Making (NDM) perspective suggests that decisions in everyday life are often not made through entirely rational analytical processes but are instead based on experience, intuition, and individuals' interpretations of the situations they encounter (N.Li, 2023). Previous relationship experiences, peer influence, family support, and the *pesantren* environment may serve as sources of information that *santri* draw upon when forming attitudes toward romantic relationships. Therefore, dating decisions among *santri* can be understood as the outcome of an interaction among rational considerations, psychological conflicts, and lived experiences that shape how they interpret and respond to their circumstances.

Drawing upon these three perspectives, this study conceptualizes dating decision-making as a process that encompasses: (1) the meaning attributed to romantic relationships, (2) the identification of dating-related needs and motives, (3) consideration of social environmental influences and religious values, (4) negotiation of conflicts among available alternatives, and (5) evaluation of both the decision

made and the relationship itself. This framework serves as the foundation for developing the interview guide and interpreting participants' experiences related to dating decisions within the *pesantren* context. Based on the foregoing discussion, this study aims to explore the dynamics of dating decision-making among *santri*. Specifically, it seeks to understand how *santri* perceive romantic relationships, consider the various factors influencing their decisions, and negotiate their relational needs with the religious values that govern life within the *pesantren* environment.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative approach using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as its research design. This approach was selected because it aims to gain an in-depth understanding of individuals' subjective experiences in making sense of a particular phenomenon and how they interpret those experiences within the context of their lives. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis focuses on exploring personal lived experiences and provides an opportunity for researchers to understand the meanings that participants construct regarding the phenomena they experience (Hadi, 2021). Participants in this study were selected using a snowball sampling technique. According to Parker and Scott et al. (2019), snowball sampling is a participant recruitment method that begins with a small number of individuals who meet the research criteria. These initial participants subsequently recommend other individuals whom they consider suitable according to the criteria established by the researcher. The inclusion criteria for this study were: (1) being an active *santri* enrolled in an Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*), (2) being between 16 and 17 years of age, and (3) currently engaging in or having previously experienced a dating relationship during their time as a *santri*, as well as being willing to participate in the study.

The recruitment process continued until data saturation was achieved. In this study, the initial participants identified by the researcher were MC, ANY, and KFA. KFA subsequently recommended MAS, who then recommended AM and PAD. Participant recruitment was terminated when the data reached saturation, which occurred with a total of six participants, consisting of three male and three female *santri*.

Table 1. Demographic of Subjects

Inisial	Gender	Age	Relationship Status
MC	Female	17th	Romantic relationship status
ANY	Female	17th	Previously involved in a dating relationship
KFA	Female	17th	Romantic relationship status
MAS	Male	16th	Romantic relationship status
AM	Male	17th	Romantic relationship status
PAD	Male	17th	Previously involved in a dating relationship

The study began by identifying the phenomenon and formulating the research focus based on issues found in the field. The researcher then developed an interview guide aligned with the research objectives and relevant theoretical concepts, before recruiting participants through a *snowball sampling* technique based on predetermined inclusion criteria. Prior to data collection, participants were informed about the study's objectives, procedures, potential benefits, and their right to withdraw at any time, after which they provided voluntary consent. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and observation in order to explore participants' experiences comprehensively (Hadi, 2021). The interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and analysed using the *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis*

(IPA) approach proposed by Hadi (2021), which involved repeated reading of the transcripts, exploratory note-taking, development of emergent themes, identification of connections between themes, analysis of each individual case, and identification of cross-case thematic patterns. This process was carried out iteratively to obtain an in-depth understanding of the meanings participants constructed regarding their experiences of dating decision-making.

The trustworthiness of the data was ensured through source triangulation and *member checking* (Hadi, 2021). Triangulation was conducted by comparing data obtained from participants with information provided by key informants namely teachers, dormitory supervisors, and fellow santri at Pesantren X Bogor as well as with observational findings gathered during and outside the interview sessions. Data were considered credible when there was consistency between participants' accounts, informants' statements, and observational findings. In addition, *member checking* was conducted by returning the preliminary analysis, interpretations, and conclusions to participants for verification (Moleong, 2016). In this study, five participants were interviewed on two separate occasions; after the preliminary analysis had been completed, they were given the opportunity to provide feedback, corrections, and clarification, which were then integrated into the subsequent stages of analysis. The study also adhered to established ethical research principles by maintaining participants' confidentiality through the use of codes or initials.

Results and Discussions

1. Result

The findings derived from the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) identified six overarching themes that capture the dynamics of dating decision-making among *santri*. It Shows on table 2.

Table 2. Emergent Themes of Dating Decision-Making Among Santri

No	Main Theme	Sub-theme	Summary of Finding
1	Meaning of dating	Emotional support, sharing experiences, relationship exploration	Participants generally conceptualize dating as a positive relationship that provides emotional support and a means of interpersonal development, rather than merely a negative or deviant behavior
2	Motives for dating	Affection needs, sense of security, lack of parental figures, social influence	Dating decisions are driven by internal needs for affection and emotional comfort, as well as external influences such as peers and social media
3	Social environmental influence	Peer support or rejection, family responses, pesantren norms	The social environment plays a significant role in strengthening or

			discouraging romantic relationship decisions
4	Previous relational experience	Positive and negative past experiences	Previous romantic experiences serve as a cognitive reference that shapes expectations, evaluation, and decision-making in current relationships
5	Religious values vs relational needs conflict	Guilt, rationalization, cognitive dissonance	Participants experience psychological conflict between religious values and emotional needs, often resolved through cognitive justification strategies
6	Relationship evaluation and commitment	Relationship satisfaction, long-term orientation	Most participants evaluate their relationships positively and show commitment, with some considering long-term continuation toward marriage

a. Meaning of Dating

Five of the six participants demonstrated varied understandings and perspectives regarding dating relationships. Participants described dating as a close relationship with a member of the opposite sex, characterised by mutual affection, emotional care, support, and the exchange of advice and guidance. For them, dating involves not only romantic attraction but also emotional connectedness and interpersonal support. The following excerpts illustrate participants' views on the meaning of dating: "It is a relationship in which two people may like each other" (W1.N5.6); "It can mean taking care of each other's feelings" (W1.N5.6–7); and "Because, in my view, people who date, like in my case, are looking for mutual support" (W1.N1.635–637). Several participants also viewed dating as a way of getting to know one another before entering a more serious relationship, such as marriage. From this perspective, dating serves as a stage of mutual understanding and compatibility assessment before making a long-term commitment. One participant stated, "Because I want to get to know him first before marriage" (W2.N2.822–823). Another participant explained, "It feels like a lack of affection, perhaps like being less guided" (W1.N1.637–639). These statements indicate that romantic relationships are perceived as a source of emotional comfort and relational development, rather than merely as deviant behaviour.

b. Motives for Dating

1) Internal Motives

The motivation to engage in dating relationships may originate from within the participants themselves. Based on the accounts of all six participants, these internal motives included adolescent

ego-related desires, feelings of unhappiness, attraction towards a romantic partner, the need for someone to confide in, the desire for appreciation and validation, long-established emotional closeness, feelings of rejection or resentment, emotional vulnerability, the need for a support system, the desire for a female companion, the absence of a father figure, and distant relationships with parents.

These findings suggest that participants' decisions to engage in romantic relationships were often driven by emotional and psychological needs that they perceived as insufficiently fulfilled through other social relationships. The following excerpts illustrate several participants' accounts of their motives for dating: "From the perspective of my ego as an adolescent at this stage, if I were to have the right partner, then..." (W1.N3.26–28); "Then, secondly, maybe it was just about looking for happiness, perhaps because I lacked happiness, so I looked for that kind of happiness" (W1.N1.434–438); "That is why I thought, 'Oh, this person's effort is really impressive'; I did not get that from others, and his personality also made me feel calm. He was kind to his parents and younger siblings" (W1.N3.183–186); "Perhaps I really just wanted to find someone to talk to, someone to chat with" (W1.N5.154–155); "And one more thing, appreciation" (W1.N3.412); "For me, it was because we were already close, so it just continued for a long time" (W1.N2.92–94); "Coincidentally, the girl was not given a warning letter, so I thought, 'Well, in that case, I might as well continue it'; I was tired of it, so in the end I just carried on" (W1.N4.98–100); "In the end, as a girl who easily catches feelings, I just went along with it" (W1.N1.160–161); "Anything, really, such as when I am doing something and then being encouraged" (W1.N5.182–183); "Maybe because women tend to rely more on feelings, so when talking to a woman, it feels more connected" (W2.N5.466–468); "I do not have a father figure in my life, so I look for one" (W1.N3.54–55); and "In my opinion, because internally my family is lacking; we are rather distant, so I feel that I do not receive enough affection" (W1.N1.627–629).

2) External Motives

The motivation to engage in dating relationships did not arise solely from internal factors, but was also influenced by the surrounding environment and other external factors. All participants reported that environmental influences played a role in their decision to date. These influences included parents who did not prohibit dating, fear of missing out (FOMO) when observing other santri involved in romantic relationships, encouragement from friends to date, the influence of social media and media content, and the normalisation of dating within their social environment.

The following excerpts illustrate participants' experiences regarding external motivations for dating: "So my mother often says, 'It is not the right time for you yet. When the time comes, I will even encourage you to do it'" (W1.N1.83–85); "Back then, I experienced FOMO. I saw my friends getting to know girls, and I thought, why do I not know any girls?" (W1.N4.153–155); "Perhaps it was because I was also teased by my friends, like, 'Come on, go for it again, why not?'" (W1.N4.102–103); "Perhaps social media was also a factor; I saw Instagram accounts of people in dating relationships" (W2.N5.496–498); "For me, it first came from what I watched" (W2.N2.833); and "I do not know, perhaps because I saw that this had become very common, like, 'Well, other people are doing it too'" (W1.N4.68–70). These findings indicate that participants' dating decisions were shaped not only by personal needs and motivations, but also by social influences and prevailing norms within their immediate surroundings.

c. Social Environmental Influence

After entering into dating relationships, participants received various responses from their surrounding social environment. Some of these responses were supportive of their dating behaviour, including encouragement from friends, parental approval of the relationship, and emotional closeness and support from their partner's family. These supportive responses contributed to participants' sense of acceptance and validation regarding their romantic relationships. The following excerpts illustrate

participants' experiences of receiving support from people around them: "It could be said that they were supportive" (W1.N3.90); "My father once said, 'I have never forbidden you from dating, have I? The important thing is to stay motivated in your studies'" (W1.N6.54–56); and "My boyfriend's mother also knows; it means that our relationship has reached the family level" (W1.N3.99–101).

However, the responses participants received from their social environment were not limited to positive reactions and support. Several participants also encountered reactions that reflected disapproval of and opposition to their dating relationships. These responses included parents who opposed the relationship, parents who gave advice and warnings about dating, highly religious family members who discouraged romantic involvement, fellow santri who reminded them of religious values and offered guidance, and explicit reinforcement of the prohibition against dating by pesantren authorities.

These responses exposed participants to competing social expectations and values, requiring them to navigate tensions between their personal desires and the religious and social norms upheld by significant others in their environment. The following excerpts illustrate participants' experiences of encountering disapproval and opposition towards their dating relationships: "My parents actually did not allow me to date, but because they already knew, it was more like, 'Oh well'" (W1.N2.71–72); "It was more that she gave me advice at the beginning" (W1.N2.73–74); "No, from my family, they are really very Islamic" (W2.N5.507–508); "Some good or pious friends forbade that behaviour because it brings more harm than benefit" (W1.N4.135–137); and "Not really; it was only strongly emphasised during the recent EF event, because the event involved both groups" (W1.N2.417–418). The roles of peers, family, and pesantren norms were found to significantly shape decision-making. These narratives show that the social context functions both as a source of support and as a source of restriction in romantic relationships.

d. Previous Relational Experiences

All six participants acknowledged having previous dating or romantic relationship experiences prior to their current relationship. These past experiences played an important role in shaping their perceptions, expectations, and decisions regarding subsequent romantic relationships. Participants drew upon lessons learned from earlier relationships when evaluating potential partners, managing relationship challenges, and deciding whether to initiate or maintain a romantic relationship. One participant stated, "Erm... which number is this? In terms of dating, this is only my third relationship" (W1.N6.115). Another participant explained, "Yes, but that one was only chatting, not like... we never said that we liked each other" (W1.N2.121–123).

These experiences included both formal dating relationships and emotional closeness without a clear status, often referred to as HTS (*hubungan tanpa status*), or an undefined relationship. One participant described a negative past experience: "When I was in Year 9, I felt like I was being ghosted, and I felt that I had made a lot of effort for him, but then I was ghosted. Eventually, I thought, 'That is it, I do not want to get close to boys here anymore'" (W1.N3.217–221). In contrast, another participant described receiving a positive response from a parent: "At that point, my mother's response was very positive, and perhaps that was what made the relationship approved, because the first impression was already good" (W1.N3.563–566). Past experiences were used as reference points in evaluating current relationships, indicating that prior relational experiences function as cognitive schemas that shape current relational expectations.

e. Conflict Between Religious Values and Relational Needs

Participants experienced internal psychological tension between religious norms and emotional desires. One participant expressed, "Yes, all this time it has been true, because whatever God has decreed must have a reason behind it. One proof of this is that we can see some people who date even end up being killed; this means that dating can lead to something bad" (W1.N3.802–807). Another participant added, "I often feel, 'Oh yes, sooner or later I have to end this relationship.' Sometimes I think about it, and lately I have been thinking about it more and more" (W1.N4.447–450).

To cope with feelings of guilt arising from violating religious and institutional rules, participants often rationalised their behaviour. One participant stated, "I think of it as, as long as we do not cross the boundaries, and if, God willing, it eventually leads to marriage and becomes halal, then it is fine" (W1.N5.359–362). Similar rationalisations were expressed by other participants, such as "Although in the end I denied it by saying, 'I can avoid becoming like this'" (W1.N3.811–813); "He immediately twisted the facts, so it felt like this was safe with him" (W1.N3.648–650); and "Well, I had no intention of dating either. Then, I do not know, I just thought of it on my birthday, and then I said it" (W1.N6.386–389).

In addition to rationalisation, some participants felt that their violations of the rules were unlikely to be monitored or detected. As one participant explained, "But now it is like this: for example, if the warning letter is received in Year 11, it can still be refreshed the following year, unless it is received in Year 12" (W1.N4.395–397). Another participant stated, "Now there is no one monitoring us anymore. Who is going to monitor us? We are already in Year 12, the highest level, so it just feels safer. Before, there were people who liked reporting others, but now they have left, so I thought, well, most likely it will not be found out. I always think that way" (W1.N4.409–414). Another reason underlying participants' decisions was the desire to experience dating before entering an arranged marriage. One participant stated, "To be honest, my parents want to arrange my marriage" (W1.N4.373–374). Meanwhile, another participant preferred to let the relationship develop naturally as long as it did not cross perceived boundaries, stating, "If things are like this and nothing serious has happened yet, then I will just go along with it for now" (W1.N1.733–734). These statements reflect processes of cognitive dissonance and moral negotiation through which participants attempted to reconcile their romantic involvement with the religious values and institutional norms they recognised and understood.

f. Relationship Evaluation & Commitment

After engaging in dating relationships, participants reflected on and evaluated the relationships they were currently maintaining. Four of the six participants reported being satisfied with their current relationships and expressed a desire to eventually marry their partners. Their evaluations reflected a high level of relationship satisfaction, characterised by the absence of thoughts about ending the relationship and the presence of long-term commitment, including aspirations for marriage. In contrast, the remaining two participants expressed lingering doubts about their partners and demonstrated lower levels of commitment to maintaining the relationship. Their evaluations suggested uncertainty regarding the future of the relationship and a less definitive intention to continue the partnership in the long term. The following excerpts illustrate participants' evaluations of their current romantic relationships: "Honestly, I cannot imagine it, because I have actually been asked this many times" (W1.N1.353–354); "Yes, from my side I want it; from his side... haha" (W1.N3.311); "Actually, if there is something that makes me unsure, there is" (W2.N5.561); and "I feel that I will just let it continue, and if along the way she wants to end it, then that is fine; I would be okay with letting go" (W1.N4.367–370).

2. Discussion

This study demonstrates that dating decision-making among *santri* is not merely a behavioral choice based on romantic attraction but rather a complex psychological negotiation process involving adolescent developmental needs, social environmental influences, and the religious values upheld within the *pesantren* environment. The findings indicate that *santri* neither passively accept nor reject prevailing norms; instead, they actively interpret their lived experiences to construct decisions that they perceive as most appropriate for their needs and circumstances. Consequently, the decision to engage in dating can be understood as the outcome of a dynamic interaction among emotional needs, social validation, and moral-religious regulation.

One of the study's primary findings is that participants perceived dating as a relationship that provides emotional support, comfort, a space for sharing personal experiences, and a source of attention and care. This interpretation suggests that romantic relationships are primarily understood in terms of their perceived psychological functions rather than their normative status within religious teachings or *pesantren* regulations. In this context, participants tended to construct dating as a means of fulfilling relational needs that are considered important during adolescence. These findings indicate that individuals do not always respond to social rules according to the meanings assigned by institutions; rather, they construct subjective meanings derived from their own personal experiences. This finding is consistent with social constructionist perspectives, which argue that social reality is formed through processes of interpretation and meaning negotiation undertaken by individuals in everyday life (Ananda, 2023; Shofiyatul, 2026; Ekasari & Rosidawati et al., 2019).

The study also demonstrates that dating decisions are influenced not only by individual needs but also significantly by the social environment. Peers, social media, and observations of romantic relationships among others contributed to shaping participants' perceptions that dating is a normal part of adolescent life. Interestingly, for some participants, peer influence appeared to be stronger than the normative prohibitions imposed by the *pesantren*. This phenomenon can be understood in light of adolescent developmental characteristics, which include an increasing need for social acceptance and a sense of belonging within peer groups. During this developmental stage, peers often become a more immediate and relevant source of validation than formal authorities. These findings extend social learning perspectives, which suggest that behavior is shaped through processes of observation, imitation, and social reinforcement occurring within an individual's environment (Mumtazul, 2026; Irama, 2024; Sundari, 2025; Santrock, 2019).

Another important finding concerns the role of affection needs and family relational experiences in motivating dating decisions. Several participants described romantic relationships as sources of attention, support, and emotional closeness that they had not adequately experienced within their families. These findings suggest that romantic relationships function as compensatory mechanisms for unmet relational needs. From an attachment theory perspective, the need to establish emotional closeness during adolescence represents a continuation of relational patterns formed during childhood. When such needs are not sufficiently fulfilled within the family environment, individuals tend to seek alternative figures who can provide security and emotional support (Mardiyah, 2026; Ikrima, 2021; Fajriani, 2025).

One of the major contributions of this study is its identification of the negotiation process between religious values and relational needs experienced by *santri*. All participants understood that dating conflicted with *pesantren* regulations and the religious values they had learned. However, this awareness did not automatically prevent their involvement in romantic relationships. Instead, participants demonstrated various forms of cognitive adjustment to maintain their relationships. Some believed that

their relationships remained acceptable as long as they did not cross certain boundaries, whereas others emphasized the emotional benefits they gained rather than the potential risks involved. These findings suggest that the internalization of religious norms does not necessarily result in consistent behavioral compliance, particularly when individuals face psychological needs that they perceive as urgent and important.

This phenomenon can be explained through cognitive dissonance theory, which posits that individuals experience psychological discomfort when their behavior conflicts with their beliefs (Aulia, 2022; Stari, 2025). To reduce this discomfort, individuals tend to engage in rationalization, reinterpret social norms, or modify certain beliefs so that their behavior remains psychologically acceptable. In the present study, participants did not reject religious teachings; rather, they adjusted the meanings they attributed to their romantic relationships. Thus, the conflict observed was not a conflict between religiosity and non-religiosity but rather a conflict between two needs that participants considered equally important: the need to remain religious individuals and the need to experience emotional intimacy.

Furthermore, the findings revealed forms of subtle resistance to *pesantren* regulations. This resistance was not expressed through open rejection of religious values or institutional authority but through strategies that enabled participants to maintain romantic relationships without abandoning their religious identities. These strategies included concealing relationships, limiting certain forms of interaction, and constructing moral justifications that framed their relationships as remaining within acceptable boundaries. These findings demonstrate that *santri* are not merely passive subjects of a social system that regulates their behavior; rather, they are active agents who creatively negotiate institutional rules and personal needs in their everyday lives.

In addition, previous relationship experiences were found to influence how participants made decisions regarding their current relationships. Positive experiences increased participants' confidence in pursuing new romantic relationships, whereas negative experiences served as learning opportunities that shaped their expectations, boundaries, and strategies for maintaining relationships. These findings suggest that dating decisions are not made in isolation but are influenced by experiences accumulated throughout individuals' lives. This finding is consistent with perspectives that view past experiences as interpretive frameworks through which individuals understand present situations and anticipate future consequences (Laoli, 2025; Sahun, 2020).

The findings also indicate that evaluations of relationship quality play an important role in sustaining dating decisions. When relationships were perceived as providing greater emotional benefits than the risks involved, participants tended to maintain those relationships despite recognizing conflicts with religious norms and *pesantren* regulations. This finding is consistent with Investment Theory, which proposes that commitment is influenced by relationship satisfaction, the magnitude of investments made, and perceptions of available alternatives (Knapp, 2020).

Conceptually, the findings suggest that dating decision-making among *santri* occurs through three primary stages. The first stage involves the emergence of relational needs, including needs for affection, attention, and emotional support. The second stage consists of a negotiation process between these needs and the religious values, *pesantren* regulations, and social considerations held by the individual. The third stage involves the construction of moral justifications that enable individuals to maintain romantic relationships without relinquishing their religious identities. This model suggests that dating decisions among *santri* cannot be adequately explained solely by levels of religiosity or social environmental influences. Instead, such decisions emerge from the dynamic interaction among psychological needs, social contexts, and the value systems held by individuals.

Conclusion

This study reveals that dating decision-making among Islamic boarding school students (*santri*) is not merely a manifestation of romantic attraction or a simple violation of religious norms, but rather a complex psychological process involving the negotiation of relational needs, social influences, and religious values. Participants generally perceived dating as a meaningful source of emotional support, affection, companionship, and personal growth during adolescence. Their decisions to engage in romantic relationships were driven by both internal factors, such as the need for emotional closeness, validation, and security, and external factors, including peer influence, family responses, social media exposure, and prevailing social norms. The findings further demonstrate that *santri* experienced ongoing psychological conflicts between their emotional needs and the religious values and institutional regulations upheld within the pesantren environment. To manage these tensions, participants employed various forms of cognitive and moral negotiation, including rationalization and reinterpretation of relationship boundaries. Previous relational experiences and evaluations of relationship quality also played important roles in shaping commitment and sustaining dating decisions. Overall, the findings suggest that dating among *santri* emerges through a dynamic interaction between developmental needs, social contexts, and religious commitments, highlighting the active role of adolescents in negotiating competing value systems while maintaining both relational involvement and religious identity.

The findings of this study also provide practical implications for the development of educational and adolescent support programs within Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*). Approaches that focus solely on prohibiting dating behaviors may overlook the relational needs that naturally emerge during adolescence. Therefore, support programs should not only emphasize adherence to religious norms but also assist *santri* in developing emotional regulation skills, adaptive coping strategies, healthy interpersonal relationship literacy, and an understanding of how affectional needs can be fulfilled in ways that are consistent with Islamic values. Through such an approach, *pesantren* can function not only as institutions of moral supervision but also as environments that support adolescents' psychological development in a more comprehensive manner. Future research is recommended to further explore differences in dating-related experiences between male and female *santri*, the influence of digital media on the formation of romantic relationships, and variations in cultural contexts and the strictness of regulations across different Islamic boarding schools. Longitudinal studies are also needed to better understand how the negotiation process between relational needs and religious values evolves throughout adolescence and into adulthood.

Acknowledgements

The researcher would like to express sincere gratitude to the santri, the pesantren, teachers, dormitory supervisors, and supporting informants who participated in and assisted with this study. Their support and openness were invaluable in understanding the dynamics of dating decision-making among santri in relation to developmental needs, social influences, and religious values.

References

Ananda Prayogi, Masruhan, & Moh Hasbulloh. (2023). Konstruksionisme Sebagai Paradigma Epistemologi: Konsep dan Penerapannya Dalam Penelitian Sosial. *The Indonesian Journal of Social Studies*, *6*(1), 28–39. https://doi.org/10.26740/ijss.v6n1.p28-39

Aulia, E. S. Y., & Suryanto, S. (2022). Hubungan Ketidakpatuhan ditinjau dari Mispersepsi dan Disonansi Kognitif sebagai Variabel Mediator. *JIIP - Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Pendidikan*, *5*(8), 3005-3010. https://doi.org/10.54371/jiip.v5i8.791

Bai, H. (2019). Preparing teacher education students to integrate mobile learning into elementary education. *TechTrends*, *63*(6), 723–733. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11528-019-00424-z

Berg, B. L., Lune, H., & Lune, H. (2004). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences* (Vol. 5). Boston, MA: Pearson.

Cici NM, Notoatmojo S, Ulfa L. Determinants ofAdolescent's Dating Behavior.(2021). Vol. 6 No. 3 (2020): Journal of Community Health. Available from: https://jurnal.htp.ac.id/index.php/keskom/article/view/573

Czichos, H., & Saito, T. (2006). *Springer handbook of materials measurement methods* (Vol. 978). L. Smith (Ed.). Berlin: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-540-30300-8

Dakir, D., & Anwar, H. (2020). Nilai-nilai pendidikan pesantren sebagai core value; dalam menjaga moderasi islam di indonesia. Jurnal Islam Nusantara, 3(2), 495-517.

Du, L., & Lv, B. (2024). Factors influencing students' acceptance and use generative artificial intelligence in elementary education: An expansion of the UTAUT model. *Education and Information Technologies*, *29*, 24715–24734. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-024-12835-4

Ekasari, M. F., & Rosidawati, A. J. (2019). Pengalaman pacaran pada remaja awal. Wahana Inovasi: Jurnal Penelitian dan Pengabdian Masyarakat UISU, 8(1).

Fajriani, Iip, Asiah Asiah, Siti Mariah, Resti Pujiyanti, Pitria Mayasari. (2025). Peran Kelekatan (Attachment) Orang Tua Dalam Pembentukan Emosi Positif Anak Usia Dini : Studi Literatur. *Childhood Educational Journal (CEJO)*, *1*(2, Desember), 105-113. https://e-journal.padaud.id/index.php/sm/article/view/24

Fischli, A. E., Godfraind, T., & Purchase, I. F. H. (1998). Conclusions and Recommendations. *Pure and Applied Chemistry, 70*(9), 1863-1865. https://doi.org/10.1351/pac199870091863

F. Xiao, J. Wen and W. Pedrycz, "Generalized Divergence-Based Decision Making Method With an Application to Pattern Classification," in *IEEE Transactions on Knowledge and Data Engineering*, vol. 35, no. 7, pp. 6941-6956, 1 July 2023, doi: 10.1109/TKDE.2022.3177896

Hadi, A., & Asrori, R. (2021). Qualitative Research in Phenomenological Studies, Case Studies, Grounded Theory, Ethnography, and Biography. Purwokerto: CV Pena Persada.

Harahap, Farida. (2023). Adolescent Romantic Relationships Stages Theory as a Reference for Parents to Assist Teenagers in a Romantic Relationship. Buletin Psikologi Volume 31, Nomor 2, 2023: 192– 214 DOI: 10.22146/buletinpsikologi.87386

Ikrima, N., & Khoirunnisa, R. N. (2021). Hubungan Antara Attachment (Kelekatan) Orang Tua Dengan Kemandirian Emosional Pada Remaja Jalanan. *Character Jurnal Penelitian Psikologi*, *8*(9), 37–47. https://doi.org/10.26740/cjpp.v8i9.41918

Irama, D., Sutarto, S., & RISAL, S. . (2024). Implementasi Teori Belajar Sosial Menurut Albert Bandura Dalam Pembelajaran Pai. *Jurnal Literasiologi*, *12*(4). https://doi.org/10.47783/literasiologi.v12i4.819

Knapp, M. L., Vangelisti, A. L., & Caughlin, J. (2020). *Interpersonal Communication and Human Relationships*. (8 ed.) Kendall Hunt Publishing Co.

Laoli, Briyan Wirawan Putra, Demi Etika Waruru, Candra Eka Trisno Lase. (2025). Kecerdasan Emosional Dalam Manajemen Pengambilan Keputusan. (2025). *Jurnal Ilmu Ekonomi Dan Bisnis*, *2*(1), 23-30. https://doi.org/10.70134/jukoni.v2i1.265

Lunenburg, F. C. (2010, September). The decision making process. In National Forum of Educational Administration & Supervision Journal (Vol. 27, No. 4).

McDonough, J., & Shaw, C. (2012). Materials and Methods in ELT. John Wiley & Sons.

Moleong, L. J. (2016). Metodologi penelitian kualitatif. PT Remaja Rosdakarya Bandung.

Mumtazul Imamah, & Mohammad Rofiq. (2026). Integrasi Modeling Dan Reinforcement Dalam Pembentukan Perilaku Religius Peserta Didik Di Sekolah: Perspektif Teori Pembelajaran Sosial. *Jurnal Psikososial Dan Pendidikan*, *2*(1), 1024–1034. Retrieved from https://publisherqu.com/index.php/psikosospen/article/view/3969

Mardiyah, Ainul, Naiya Arinda, Hafizah Tarihoran, Nayla Aisyah Pajarina Tanjung. (2026). Peran Pola Asuh Orang Tua Terhadap Kedekatan Emosional Dan Kesejahteraan Remaja 18 Tahun: Studi Kualitatif. *Jurnal Ilmu Psikologi Dan Kesehatan / E-ISSN : 3063-1467*, *2*(4), 233-242. https://doi.org/10.62379/jipk.v2i4.1545

N. Li, J. Huang, Y. Feng, K. Huang and G. Cheng, "A Review of Naturalistic Decision-Making and Its Applications to the Future Military,". (2023). in *IEEE Access*, vol. 8, pp. 38276-38284. doi: 10.1109/ACCESS.2020.2974317

Rahmatullah, A. S., & Purnomo, H. (2020). Kenakalan Remaja Kaum Santri Di Pesantren (Telaah Deskriptif-Fenomenologis) . Ta'allum: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam, 8(2), 222-245.

Sahun, Aditya Kumar, R.K.Padhy, Amandeep Dhir. (2020). Envisioning the Future of Behavioral Decision-Making: A Systematic Literature Review of Behavioral Reasoning Theory. Anzmac Volume 28, Issue 4. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ausmj.2020.05.001

Saputri, C. A. ., & F, F. (2022). Faktor-faktor yang Berhubungan dengan Perilaku Pacaran Remaja di SMKN 2 Sewon. *An Idea Nursing Journal*, *1*(01), 51–59. https://doi.org/10.53690/inj.v1i01.140

Sari, F. A. (2017). Gaya Pacaran Mahasiswa-Mahasiswi Santri Pondok Pesantren di Yogyakarta. E-Societas: Jurnal Pendidikan Sosiologi, 6(8).

Santrock, J. W. (2011). Life-Span Development Ed. 13 Jil 2. Jakarta: Penerbit Erlangga

Scharding, T. K., & Warren, D. E. (2023). When Workplace Norms Conflict: Using Intersubjective Reflection to Guide Ethical Decision-Making. *Business Ethics Quarterly*, *33*(2), 352–380. doi:10.1017/beq.2021.44

Shofiyyatul Fuadah, Muhammad Hikam Ainul Atho', & Mohammad Rofiq. (2026). TEORI KONSTRUKSI SOSIAL. *Jurnal Psikososial Dan Pendidikan*, *2*(1), 789–795. Retrieved from https://publisherqu.com/index.php/psikosospen/article/view/3921

Simonson, M., Zvacek, S. M., & Smaldino, S. (2019). Teaching and learning at a distance: Foundations of distance education 7th edition.

Soliah, Y., Sarwa, S., & Widyoningsih. (2023). Hubungan Antara Religiusitas Dengan Perilaku Seks Pada Remaja (Literature Review). *Medika Alkhairaat: Jurnal Penelitian Kedokteran Dan Kesehatan*, *5*(3), 213-218. https://doi.org/10.31970/ma.v5i3.151

Stari, Choria Nur; Christanti, Dessi. (2025). Gambaran Disonansi Kognitif pada Individu yang Menjalani Hubungan Friends With Benefits (FWB). Cerdika: Jurnal Ilmiah Indonesia, 2025, v. 5, n. 7, p. 2301, doi. 10.59141/cerdika.v5i7.2758

Sulhan, Nur Atiqah Azzah, Nur Hafidzah Ardaniah, Nasrullah, Muhammad Syarif Rahmadi. (2024). Periodisasi Perkembangan Anak Pada Masa Remaja: Tinjauan Psikologi. Behavior: Jurnal Pendidikan Bimbingan Konseling dan PsikologiVolume 1 No 1 Mei 2024

Sundari, J., Utami, F. K., Marhamah, R., Sutarto, S., & Sari, D. P. (2025). Peran Teori Belajar Sosial (Bandura) Dalam Pembentukan Sikap Religius Siswa Di Sd Negeri 168 Rejang Lebong. *Jurnal Literasiologi*, *14*(3). https://doi.org/10.47783/literasiologi.v14i3.1067

Syamsi, I. (2000). Pengambilan Keputusan dan Sistem Informasi, Cetakan Ke-2.

Tempo.co (2015, 22 September). Dilarang Pacaran, Santri Ini Bawa Parang, Ancam Bunuh Ustaz. Diakses pada 17 November 2022, dari https://nasional.tempo.co/read/702886/dilarang-pacaran-santri-ini-bawa-parang-ancam-bu nuh-ustaz

Wilson, E. B. (1990). *An introduction to scientific research*. Courier Corporation.

Yulika, A., & Setiawan, K. C. (2017). Kematangan Beragama dengan Perilaku Pacaran pada Santri MA di Pondok Pesantren Modern Al-Furqon Prabumulih. Psikis: Jurnal Psikologi Islami, 3(1), 60-69.