

The Role of Mental Health Literacy Education and Self-Stigma in Shaping Help-Seeking Intentions among Male Santri

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Abstract

There are many factors that can reduce the quality of learning in Islamic boarding schools (pondok pesantren), one of which is mental health issues. Cases such as bullying, juvenile delinquency, and depression among students are examples of problems that need attention to ensure that students have the knowledge to help themselves or others when needed. This study aims to explore the role of mental health literacy and self-stigma in shaping help-seeking intentions among male students at Pondok Pesantren X in Pekanbaru City. Low mental health literacy and the internalization of negative perceptions can lead to poor ability to recognize mental health problems, the development of inappropriate beliefs and attitudes toward mental health issues, and ineffective help-seeking behaviors. Through purposive sampling techniques, 84 male students were selected as research subjects. Data collection was conducted using the TPB Questionnaire, the Mental Health Literacy Scale (MHLS), and the Self-Stigma of Seeking Help (SSOSH). The results of multiple regression analysis showed $F = 19.880$ ($p = 0.00$) with an R Square value of 0.329. This indicates that mental health literacy and self-stigma simultaneously contribute to help-seeking intentions with a contribution rate of 32.9%. It can be concluded that male students with good mental health literacy and low self-stigma are more likely to have strong intentions to seek help.

Keywords: help-seeking intention, mental health literacy education, self-stigma, santri

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INTRODUCTION

Santri is a teenager who pursues education at an Islamic boarding school that emphasizes Islamic teachings. Education at Islamic boarding schools integrates general knowledge with an Islamic perspective. The integration of general knowledge and an Islamic perspective at Islamic boarding schools aims to shape santri who are knowledgeable, have good character, and are ready to face the challenges of the times. By harmonizing faith and science, santri not only understand Islamic teachings but also have a broad understanding of modern science. On the other hand, santri living in pesantren experience higher levels of stress due to their busy schedules and heavy demands (Fitriani et al., 2020). Sources of stress for santri come from both themselves and their environment. Afriani (2020) states that santri in Islamic boarding schools face various challenges related to adolescence, including individual problems, self-regulation, and social integration. Difficulties in adjusting and managing oneself in the boarding school environment can create

mental health problems that negatively impact academic performance ('Ainin et al., 2023). The learning patterns and character development in Islamic boarding schools are different from those in public schools. Students in Islamic boarding schools are involved in various additional activities and are required to comply with regulations to achieve the targets set by the boarding school. This burden and pressure can trigger stress, which is characterized by symptoms such as dizziness, worry, difficulty sleeping, and difficulty concentrating (Khamida et al., 2020).

The high levels of stress and mental health issues among adolescents are not accompanied by corresponding help-seeking behavior. According to the 2022 I-NAMHS survey, only 2% have ever used mental health services (I-NAMHS, 2022). This indicates that very few adolescents experiencing mental health issues seek professional help, such as psychologists, despite the difficulty of resolving these issues on their own. Boarding school students are a group of adolescents who also face these challenges. There are many factors that determine whether someone seeks help, but the most important is the intention to seek help (Nurhayati, 2013). The main reasons adolescents do not seek help through mental health services are because they feel comfortable handling problems on their own, do not trust others, and view mental health issues as private (Dan et al., 2021). Low intention to seek help can have adverse effects on mental health and disrupt the learning process. Therefore, it is important to encourage students to have good awareness of mental health and seek help from mental health professionals (Yuniasih et al., 2023).

The intention to seek help is a desire or readiness that a person has to seek help from mental health professionals and services to provide support when they have concerns about their mental health (Hammer & Spiker, 2018). In line with this, the intention to seek help is also defined as an individual's readiness to seek assistance from mental health services (Mo & Mak, 2009). Individuals with the intention to seek help are motivated to take action, such as actively seeking out sources of assistance with the aim of sharing their issues with experts in the field. Help-seeking is an adaptive coping process that aims to seek external assistance to resolve mental health-related problems (Rickwood et al., 2012). The intention to seek help is measured based on the concept of intention in the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991). The greater a person's intention to perform a behavior, the more likely that behavior will occur.

According to Ajzen (1991), there are three aspects of the intention to seek help. The first is attitude toward behavior, which refers to an individual's evaluation or level of openness toward a mental health service. Attitude influences trust in the assistance provided, and each individual will question whether the mental health service will have a positive or negative impact on them (Mak & Davis, 2014). Adolescents who view mental health services received from professionals as beneficial to themselves are more likely to have the intention to seek help when they have problems. The second aspect is subjective norm, which is the social pressure felt when an individual decides whether to seek professional help. In adolescents, subjective norms shape their beliefs about certain references needed to perform an action to fulfill the normative beliefs of others around them (). Next, the third aspect is perceived behavioral control, which describes individuals' perceptions of how easy or difficult it is for them to seek psychological help from professional services. Adolescents obtain this control from the resources they have, such as skills, knowledge, and opportunities to seek help.

Mental health issues that are not addressed seriously can worsen conditions and even lead to suicidal thoughts (MacKinnon & Colman, 2016). A tragic case at a boarding school in Cilincing, North Jakarta, where a male student was found dead by hanging, allegedly due to depression, highlights the seriousness of mental health issues among students and the low rate of help-seeking as a preventive measure (Kompas, 2020). It is stated that the intention to seek help is a key predictor of a student's success in education. This means that, especially in mental health, teachers and boarding schools as institutions play a crucial role in fostering openness among students so they do not face barriers in seeking and choosing information about mental health from professionals.

Women have a better attitude toward seeking help compared to men (Nagai et al., 2023). Women have a higher tendency to seek help compared to men, and women intend to seek help

only from friends and family members. Female participants more frequently mentioned the use of formal services (e.g., general practitioners and youth health services) compared to male participants. In contrast, boys are less likely to consult and recommend professional help and are more likely to recommend strategies to overcome problems independently than girls.

A person's attitude toward seeking help from mental health professionals is related to gender. Women are more likely to have knowledge about the symptoms and treatment of mental health problems than men (Rafal et al., 2018). Additionally, males exhibit less supportive attitudes toward seeking help, influenced by masculine values such as suppressing emotions and feeling unnecessary to ask for assistance (Putri & Wilani, 2023; Vebiana & Ariana, 2023). The stigma surrounding mental health issues in society also influences the perspectives of male adolescents who are students at Islamic boarding schools. Some students believe that mental health issues are related to low religious knowledge and faith (Fatahya & Abidin, 2022; Guntur et al., 2022). Therefore, when facing problems related to school, family, or friendships, male students tend to keep their grievances to themselves out of fear of being mocked or perceived as lacking in religious practice. Self-stigma can be described as a reduction in self-esteem caused by labeling oneself as something that is not socially acceptable by society (Vogel et al., 2006).

Stigma related to mental health issues can influence male students to avoid seeking mental health assistance (Liddle et al., 2021). The process of internalizing negative labels from society gradually leads to a decrease in self-esteem and self-efficacy. Stigma can hinder adolescents' intentions to seek help from mental health professionals. When individuals internalize stigma toward themselves or certain groups, this can lead to the emergence of stereotypes, prejudices, and discriminatory treatment toward those seeking mental health assistance (Corrigan, 2004).

In addition to self-stigma, mental health literacy is also a factor that influences the intention to seek help. Mental health literacy was introduced by Jorm et al. (1997) as the understanding and beliefs of the community regarding mental health disorders, including their ability to recognize, cope with, or prevent mental health disorders. Inaccurate knowledge about mental health issues also contributes to shaping the intention to seek help from mental health professionals, especially among male adolescents (Gulliver et al., 2010). In Islamic boarding schools, where all students live in a group setting, there are various mental health problems and a lack of knowledge about this issue (Afriani, 2020). According to schools, they are the best place to provide mental health literacy education. Teachers, with their more reliable educational capabilities, can introduce mental health literacy through various programs such as incorporating mental health knowledge into lessons, seminars, campaigns, posters, or special classes on mental health literacy. In Gulliver's research, education on mental health literacy resulted in positive attitudes toward seeking help.

Research conducted by Noerhidajati & Sofa (2022) shows that santri have a low level of knowledge about mental health, which prevents them from recognizing the symptoms and treatment of mental health problems. Santri who have a good level of mental health literacy tend to be more open to psychological counseling with professionals (Yuniasih et al., 2023). This indicates that mental health literacy plays an important role in the intention to seek help from mental health professionals and prevent the negative impacts of mental health issues. Mental health literacy encompasses an individual's knowledge and beliefs about mental disorders to help in recognizing, addressing, or preventing a mental health issue (Jorm et al., 1997).

Based on the above, this study aims to analyze the relationship between mental health literacy and self-stigma toward the intention to seek help among male students at Pondok Pesantren X in Pekanbaru City. This study is expected to provide a clearer picture of mental health issues among students and encourage an increase in mental health literacy and a decrease in self-stigma to improve the intention to seek help.

METHODS

Research Design

This study is a quantitative study using a correlational method. The focus of this study is to examine the role of mental health literacy and self-stigma in shaping the intention to seek help among male Islamic boarding school students. This study was conducted at an Islamic boarding school in Pekanbaru City.

Participants

The population in this study were male students at Islamic Boarding School X in Pekanbaru City. The sample in this study was taken using a non-probability sampling technique with purposive sampling. The criteria were aged 15-18 years, male, active students at Islamic Boarding School X in Pekanbaru City, and students at risk of mental health disorders based on initial screening. Based on the results of a meta-analysis conducted by Nurhayati (2013), seeking help behavior has three characteristics, one of which is problem-oriented, which makes seeking help a coping strategy for individuals with physical or psychological problems.

The mental health screening process was conducted using the Brief Mental Health Inventory (BMHI-12) by Aziz (2015), and the categorization of subjects followed the criteria outlined by Keyes (2002), where each aspect of Psychological Well-being and Psychological Distress was divided into two levels: high score and low score. If male students have a total score on the Psychological Well-being aspect above the upper threshold and a score on the Psychological Distress aspect below the lower threshold, it means that the male students have high Psychological Well-being. Conversely, if male students have a total score on the Psychological Well-being aspect below the lower threshold and a score on the Psychological Distress aspect above the upper threshold, it means that the male students have high Psychological Distress. Based on the above criteria, a total of 84 male students were categorized as having high Psychological Distress because this category is considered to represent suboptimal mental health or, in other words, these male students are at risk of mental health disorders, which can be seen from their intention to seek help.

Data Collection

Intentions to seek help were measured using the TPB Questionnaire by Mo & Mak (2009), mental health literacy was measured using the Mental Health Literacy Scale (MHLS) by O'Connor & Casey (2015), while self-stigma was measured using the Self-Stigma of Seeking Help (SSOSH) by Vogel et al. (2006). Based on the validity test results, a number of relevant items were obtained that were consistent with the scale measurement objectives, namely 13 items on the intention to seek help scale, 27 items on the mental health literacy scale, and 6 items on the self-stigma scale. Then, reliability tests were conducted on each scale using the Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient technique. The coefficients obtained were 0.848 for the intention to seek help scale, 0.895 for the mental health literacy scale, and 0.723 for the self-stigma scale.

Data Analysis

The assumption testing technique in this study used the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for normality, the Compare Mean and Test for Linearity analysis for linearity, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and Tolerance values for multicollinearity, and the significance value for heteroscedasticity. The hypothesis testing technique used in this study was multiple linear regression analysis with the help of IBM Statistical Packages for Social Sciences version 25 (SPSS 25) for Windows.

FINDING AND DISCUSSIONS

This study involved 84 male students who met the screening requirements. Subjects were classified by age and grade level. Based on demographic data, grade 10 subjects were the largest group with a percentage of 58.3%, while the 16-year-old age group dominated by 59.5%. Next, a categorization analysis of research data was conducted to identify the position of students based

on sleep quality, smartphone addiction, and academic stress levels. The results show that the three variables are in the moderate category, as shown in the table below.

Table 1. Research data categorization

Variables	Categorization		
	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)
Intention to Seek Help	2 (2%)	43 (42.6%)	39 (38.6%)
Mental Health Literacy	1 (1%)	73 (72.3%)	10 (9.9%)
Self Stigma	18 (17.8%)	63 (62.4%)	3 (3%)

Based on Table 1, it can be seen that in the variable of intention to seek help, the majority of male students have a moderate intention of 42.6%, followed by a high category of 38.6% and a low category of 2%. Furthermore, in the mental health literacy variable, the majority of male students have moderate mental health literacy, which is 72.3%, followed by the high category at 9.9% and the low category at 1%. Next, in the self-stigma variable, the majority of male students have self-stigma in the moderate category, which is 62.4%, followed by the low category at 17.8% and the high category at 3%.

The next step was to test the assumptions before testing the hypothesis. The assumption tests conducted were normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity. Based on the normality test results, the significance was 0.072 (>0.05). The linearity test results showed a value of $p=0.000$. The multicollinearity test showed a VIF value of $1.237 < 10$ and a tolerance value of $0.809 > 0.1$. Meanwhile, the heteroscedasticity test for mental health literacy yielded a value of 0.723 and self-stigma yielded a value of 0.902 (assumption test concluded). Since all the assumption tests met the criteria, the hypothesis testing can proceed using the multiple linear regression method.

Table 2. Multiple linear regression test results

Variables	Sig.	F	R Square
Mental Health Literacy and Self-Stigma towards Help-Seeking Intentions	0,000	19,880	0.329

Based on the results of multiple linear regression tests, mental health literacy and self-stigma both showed a significance value of 0.000, with an F count of 19.880. These findings indicate that the model is statistically significant. Additionally, the R Square value was found to be 0.329. This means that mental health literacy and self-stigma together contributed 32.9% to the variance in the intention to seek help. In other words, 32.9% of individuals' help-seeking intentions can be explained by their levels of mental health literacy and self-stigma, while the remaining 67.1% is influenced by other factors.

Table 3. Linear regression test results

Variables	Sig.	count	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (r)
Mental Health Literacy and Help-Seeking Intentions	0,000	3,989	0.521	0.00
Self-Stigma and Help-Seeking Intentions	0.010	-2,647	-0.444	

Based on the results of linear regression, there is a positive relationship between mental health literacy and intention to seek help, as seen from the significance of 0.000 with a t-value of 3.989. Meanwhile, the relationship between self-stigma and intention to seek help obtained a significance of 0.01 with a t-value of -2.647. Additionally, it is evident that mental health literacy has a moderate and significant relationship with the intention to seek help, with a value of $r=0.521$. This relationship is positive, meaning that the higher the mental health literacy of male students, the higher their intention to seek help. Similarly, self-stigma also shows a moderate and significant relationship with the intention to seek help, with a value of $r=-0.444$. The relationship between these two variables is negative, meaning that the lower the self-stigma of male students, the higher their intention to seek help.

This study involved 84 male students at Pondok Pesantren X in Pekanbaru who, according to the screening results, experienced psychological distress in the high category. The results of this study showed that most male students exhibited high psychological distress. Individuals with psychological distress are characterized by high levels of anxiety, depression, and loss of control (Veit & Ware, 1983). Male students who feel anxious, characterized by restlessness, worry, or fear, and those who feel depressed, characterized by deep sadness and an inability to consciously control their emotions, are at risk of developing mental health disorders. However, the high prevalence of psychological distress among male santri is accompanied by a reluctance to seek mental health services or professional help (help-seeking).

Based on the analysis conducted, it was found that mental health literacy and self-stigma play a role in the intention to seek help among male santri at Pondok Pesantren X in Pekanbaru City. This study aligns with the research by Cheng et al. (2018) and Kartikasari & Ariana (2019), which found that individuals with adequate mental health literacy and positive self-stigma are better able to recognize and take preventive actions regarding their mental health conditions. The findings of Sari & Asiyah (2022) also revealed that mental health literacy and self-stigma positively influence the intention to seek help.

Based on the categorization of the intention to seek help, it was found that male students at Pondok Pesantren X in Pekanbaru City fall into the moderate category. Individuals who do not seek mental health assistance when needed are likely to exacerbate their mental health issues (Cheng et al., 2018). A study conducted by Syakarofath & Widyasari (2023) showed that low knowledge about mental health issues is related to low ability in recognizing symptoms, leading to false beliefs and negative perceptions about mental health-related matters, which are the most common reasons for the absence of individual intention to seek help.

This study also found that mental health literacy is positively associated with the intention to seek help. This means that the better the mental health literacy of male students, the greater the likelihood that they will seek help. The findings of this study align with the results of a study conducted by Clark et al. (2020) on male students in Australia, which showed that mental health literacy is positively and significantly associated with the intention to seek help. Mental health literacy is demonstrated by knowledge about types of mental health issues, access to mental health information, risk factors and causes, treatment, and professional help. The more information students have about these things, the more likely they are to seek help.

There are various sources where adolescents can obtain education about mental health literacy. The internet can be the cheapest means of obtaining information about mental health, although it can be quite risky for adolescents if they are not accompanied (). Schools are the most ideal institutions for providing education on mental health literacy because of their more systematic and structured learning systems, which enable adolescents to receive guidance from teachers. During adolescence, education related to knowledge, insight, and values can be delivered through educational programs such as mental health lessons, seminars, or lighter activities such as posters, articles, advertisements, or artistic activities.

Based on the results of data categorization, it is known that mental health literacy among male students at Pondok Pesantren X in Pekanbaru City is in the moderate category. Male students at Pondok Pesantren X in Pekanbaru City have a basic understanding of mental health issues but are not yet fully able to significantly change their lifestyle to reduce the risk of mental health problems, so many of them do not utilize professional mental health services in their environment. This aligns with Nurfadilah et al.'s (2021) study among university students, where they were aware of the availability of mental health professionals on campus but did not have the intention to visit them. The findings of this study expand on similar findings by showing that although knowledge about mental health information has a dominant influence on the intention to seek help, many of them are unaware of when to seek help or underestimate the severity of the problems they are experiencing. It is possible that mental health promotion in Islamic boarding schools is not yet optimal because there has been no comprehensive assessment of the mental health problems of students there.

In addition to educational factors at school, the condition of students living far from parental supervision also contributes to the suboptimal development of mental health literacy. The daily routine at boarding schools, which is filled with rules and Quran memorization, undoubtedly creates pressure and a lack of outlets for students to express themselves (Afriani, 2020). Therefore, it is crucial for students to have a good understanding of various aspects related to mental health, fostering awareness and concern about their own mental health, which in turn will motivate them to seek professional assistance outside of their immediate environment (Hammer & Spiker, 2018). Here, effective communication between teachers and parents about the students' conditions is essential. Additionally, the role of teachers and boarding schools in providing facilities such as counseling teachers or access to partner psychologists will greatly support students' confidence in seeking help. Furthermore, continuing to emphasize the importance of maintaining mental health to support educational success should be emphasized in every learning activity and interaction with students.

In addition to mental health literacy, self-stigma has also been proven to have a negative relationship with the intention to seek help among male students. The findings of this study align with the results of Vebiana & Ariana (2023), which indicate that self-stigma is associated with the intention to seek help among males. Students with high self-stigma or increasingly negative views of themselves experience reduced self-esteem, leading to a decrease in the desire, willingness, or intention to seek psychological assistance from mental health services. This is because seeking help from mental health services tends to be internalized by individuals as a form of inferiority or inadequacy (Vogel et al., 2006; Hazizah et al., 2024). Men often feel obligated to internalize ideological norms, such as the necessity to be strong, competitive, and suppress emotional expression compared to women (Handrianto et al., 2020; Ibrahim et al., 2021). These norms can have a negative impact on their attitudes and perceptions toward seeking mental health services, resulting in low motivation among male students to access professional help. In general, the self-stigma of male students toward the intention to seek mental health assistance can be explained through three main aspects. First, stereotypes are formed from collective beliefs in the social environment that men must always be strong and not show emotional vulnerability. These beliefs lead male adolescents to view seeking help as a sign of weakness. Second, prejudices emerge in the form of negative judgments toward students who seek psychological assistance, ultimately lowering their self-esteem and self-efficacy. They begin to feel that they are incapable of leading a normal life if they require mental support. Third, discrimination manifests as behavioral treatment when adolescents who demonstrate a need for assistance are treated differently or even shunned by their environment. The combination of these three aspects reinforces self-stigma, making male adolescents increasingly reluctant to access professional mental health services.

Based on the results of data categorization, it was proven that self-stigma among male students at Islamic Boarding School X in Pekanbaru City was in the moderate category. This reflects a fairly adequate view of the importance of seeking help from mental health services when someone experiences mental problems that are difficult to handle on their own, but this view has not fully developed because there are still significant barriers preventing male students at Islamic Boarding School X in Pekanbaru City from seeking help from mental health services. This self-stigma can manifest in the form of shame, fear of being perceived as weak, or concerns about negative perceptions from peers and the surrounding environment. Men tend to view mental health through the lens of societal stereotypes, such as the belief that highly religious individuals do not develop mental illnesses and that depression is a sign of personal weakness (Fatahya & Abidin, 2022; Matt et al., 2022). Individuals who agree with negative stereotypes develop negative feelings and emotional reactions toward the stereotyped group, known as prejudice (Corrigan, 2002; Ramadhani et al., 2022).

This study has several limitations. First, the research was conducted in only one Islamic boarding school and involved only male students, so the findings cannot be generalized to a wider population. Additionally, the data collection period coincided with school exam schedules,

resulting in a small sample size due to limited opportunities for researchers to recruit more students at the school.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the data analysis conducted, this study concludes that mental health literacy and self-stigma simultaneously play a role in shaping the help-seeking intention among male students at Pondok Pesantren X in Pekanbaru. This study also concludes that mental health literacy and self-stigma partially have a relationship with the help-seeking intention in male students at the X Islamic Boarding School (Pondok Pesantren) in Pekanbaru. These findings indicate that efforts to improve mental health literacy education and reduce self-stigma should be a priority in interventions aimed at increasing the tendency of male students to seek help in the boarding school environment. Based on the research findings, several strategic recommendations can be proposed to support the improvement of the intention to seek mental health services, particularly in the boarding school environment. Suggestions for students are to seek information actively, have the courage to open up and take advantage of the mental health services available at Islamic boarding schools. Islamic boarding schools should provide full support to students through Kyai, Ustadz and administrators to provide direction during lectures or learning activities regarding seeking help with mental health services. Apart from that, Islamic boarding schools need to collaborate with mental health services to facilitate students' access to mental health services or specifically provide mental health service centres handled by guidance counsellors and psychologists. Future researchers should consider other factors besides mental health literacy and self-stigma when examining intentions to seek help and use subjects with different characteristics in this research.

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