

Theology of health of Quranic pesantren in the time of COVID-19



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Applying the dormitory system for thousands of *santri* (student of Islamic boarding school in Indonesia), Quranic *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) has been considered as one of the main culprits in the spread of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). Such assumption is created solely from the applicable health protocols and protective measures to avoid COVID-19 transmission in *pesantren*. As a matter of fact, *pesantrens* are known to have applied a distinctive way of coping with COVID-19. This study aims to elucidate the theology of health of Quranic *pesantren* in the face of COVID-19. Research data were generated through observational method on three Quranic *pesantrens* in Yogyakarta, interviews with caregivers, the COVID-19 task force of the *pesantren*, *santri* and documentation related to the handling of COVID-19 in the three *pesantrens*. The results showed that the Quranic *pesantren* as a subculture has a distinctive way of dealing with COVID-19 pandemic by integrating modified health protocols in accordance with the actual conditions of the *pesantren* and by applying rituals of Islamic spirituality by reciting verses of the Qur'an, *salawat* (prayers for the Prophet), prayers and *hizib* (prayer for salvation and rejecting calamities). Three *pesantrens* chose these methods by drawing on the belief that COVID-19 is God's creature and, thus, it only works on God's orders and will stop if God wills. In line with this, this study suggests a method for handling COVID-19 by not only emphasising the health protocols and medical procedures but also taking into account the importance of local wisdom.

Contribution statement: This article contributes to the strategy of COVID-19 handling by combining the health protocols of COVID-19 and the applicable local wisdom, such as religious ritual as practiced by numerous *pesantren* in Indonesia.

Keywords: theology of health; Quranic *pesantren*; COVID-19; spiritual; local wisdom.

Introduction

Pesantren, which has long been known as the place to learn about Islam, *tafaqquh fi al-din* (gaining a deeper understanding on Islamic studies) (Dhofier 1984; Suryadi & Mansur 2017; Wahid 2001), is now faced with the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, which has caused unprecedented educational disruption. The rapid spread of COVID-19 has turned some *pesantrens* into a new cluster for the transmission of the virus. According to the Deputy Minister of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia, Zainut Tauhid, as of 15 November 2020, a total of 1700 *santri* were infected (<https://www.ayotegal.com>), whilst the number of *kyai* (male leaders of *pesantren*) and *nyais* (female leaders of *pesantren*) who passed away because of COVID-19 reached 100 (<https://www.suaramerdeka.com>). There has been a constantly alarming rise of the newly emerging *pesantren* clusters as the *santri* start to return to the *pesantren*. The latest data reveal 32 *pesantrens* in clusters, soaring from the number of 27 *pesantrens* in October 2020 (<https://www.ayotegal.com>). However, the escalation in COVID-19 cases at *pesantren* was not immediately responded by sending the *santri* home to their parents. Instead, the *pesantrens* continue to carry out learning activities by complying with the *pesantren*-style health protocols. *Pesantren* as a subculture (Wahid 2001), based on its theology and rationality, has an authentic survival strategy during the COVID-19 pandemic. The measurements taken by *pesantren* in this matter, as Abdullah (2020) pointed out, are a form of reactive activity individually or collectively carried out to anticipate the spread of the virus.

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Some researches have been conducted on *pesantrens* during the COVID-19 pandemic. These researches can at least be classified into three trends. The first type of studies examines the use of online learning technology for learning process in *pesantren* during the COVID-19 pandemic (Prasetya & Fahmi 2020; Setiawan & Rizki 2020; Wasyik & Hamid 2020). This type of academic research on *pesantren* is more concerned on the learning effectiveness in *pesantren* during the pandemic amidst the challenging requirement to use internet technology as a learning medium. The second type closely examines the handling of *pesantren* in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic (Hannan, Azizah & Atiya 2020; Prasetyo, Bashori & Lailisna 2020; Prawoto et al. 2020; Qudsy, Awwabin & Sholahuddin 2020). These authors believe that *pesantrens* play an essential and responsive role in overcoming the pandemic but have varied perspectives in interpreting the COVID-19 pandemic. The third type of studies focusses on *pesantren* management in the pandemic situation (Kahfi & Kasanova 2020; Setiawan 2020). These three types of previous studies only highlight the technical-operational dimensions of the *pesantren* in dealing with COVID-19, but they are yet to explain the theological views of the *pesantren* as the basis for making an authentic response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The views of the *pesantren* influence the attitudes and measurements taken in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic (Salehudin 2018).

A study that correlates theology of health of *pesantren* and COVID-19 serves as an essential complement to the previous researches on *pesantren*. Thus, this article aims to elucidate the authenticity of *pesantrens'* attitudes in dealing with COVID-19 pandemic based on theological values. This research delineates the strategies applied by *pesantren* in handling and preventing the transmission of COVID-19 amongst the *santri* and *kyais* during the pandemic. In addition, this article also points out that theological factors shape the attitudes and strategies taken by *pesantrens* in dealing with COVID-19. Overall, this article is directed by three objectives. Firstly, it aims to describe the theological views of the Quranic *pesantrens* against the COVID-19 pandemic; secondly, it analyses the underpinning reasons for the application of health protocols in the Quranic *pesantrens*; thirdly, it describes spiritual practices of Quranic *pesantrens* and their meaning as protective measures against COVID-19. These three objectives are deemed as adequate representatives of theological views of *pesantren* in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The theological views of a community certainly affect attitudes and actions taken in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic (Ishii 2013; Tucker & Grim 2003:xvi). This article argues that in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, *pesantrens* have depicted their position as a subculture that has its own rationality (Wahid 2000). *Pesantrens* are known to have applied authentic ways in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. Such method is different from that taken by general medical practitioners who tend to only provide procedural technical solutions in dealing with COVID-19.

In particular, *pesantrens* are known to apply a technical, procedural and spiritual approach in dealing with COVID-19. The procedural approach is conducted by adapting *santri* to the new health protocols, whilst the spiritual approach is carried out by the practices of Islamic spiritual rituals through prayer, *dhikr* (the repetitive recitation of *Subhanallah*, *Alhamdulillah* and *La ilaha illa Allah, Allahu Akbar*), reciting Qur'an and reciting *salawat* (the recitation of *Allahumma salli `ala Muhammad*, Peace be upon Muhammad). Both views indicate the theology of *pesantren*, which is theocentric and anthropocentric at the same time and, thus, highlights one of the moderating sides of *pesantren*.

Literature review

Theology of health

Religion shown its immense influence not only on the level of religiosity but also on emotions, morality and even on views that determine values and attitudes of healthy behaviours (Clobert 2021; D et al. 2014). According to Kirkpatrick (2019), religiosity and individual belief in God lead to commonplace interpretation of God as a source of protection from diseases because God is the only hope for providing health and healing. In line with this, Cohen (2021) emphasised that in terms of health, the essence and symbols of religious theology encourage every individual to practice healthy lifestyle, which reflects and instils obedience to God. Mosqueiro et al. (2020) stated that theology of health provides spiritual calm and peace of mind, thereby reducing the anxiety and depression levels in patients. A high personal relationship with God enables individuals to face life and diseases through theology of joy and hope (Hancock 2020). According to Eryilmaz and Kula (2020), individual health and well-being resulted from two sources of happiness, namely, (1) a personal perspective of happiness and (2) a religious perspective of happiness. In this context, the Qur'an has described how people can stay healthy and happy based on Islamic values (Eryilmaz & Kula 2020).

The religious values have helped to shape a harmonious mindset by maintaining a well-proportioned concentration, awareness, love and wisdom in each individual (Juniartha 2017). This is in line with Shufiyah (2018) who stated that a lack understanding of religion will lead to ignorance and poor quality of life. Therefore, according to Rajab (2010), belief in theology of religions is an emotional-psychological force that turns humans into subjects who were affected by several religious dimensions, namely, (1) ritual (worship), (2) credoism (faith) and (3) norms (morals) applicable in the community. A research by William O'Neill (2017) in Africa revealed that theological understanding is of great use to transform the widely held practice of healing from traditional healing practices to theological healing practices by still taking into account their cultural practices, such as for healing emotional wounds and trauma. This is what makes theology help cure the sickness of many African women because they are hindered by cultural practices and traditions (O'Neill 2017). In line with this explanation, Rajab (2010)

pinpointed that Islam offers a system of mental development to find solutions to the increasingly rampant social problems through *tawhid* (unification of God). Jauziyah stated that health theology in Islam is primarily performed in three ways: preventive, protective and curative. Jauziyah also added that the Prophet Muhammad treated a disease with two treatments: the first treatment is psychotherapy through the reading of prayers, and the second is traditional treatment using herbal medicine (Mustaqim 2012). One form of health coaching was applied by Qudsya, Masduki and Abror (2017) through the practice of fasting on Mondays and Thursdays by Muslims, which provides various virtues for physical, mental and spiritual health and serves as a way to practise patience in the interactions with the surrounding environment.

Pandemic and religion

Pandemic is an epidemic of an infectious disease occurring worldwide that leads to the highest death toll. On the one hand, Alvarez and Cardineau (2010) presented a narrative portraying how the pandemic has killed a third of Europe's population, given its highly contagious nature. On the other hand, Camus (2012), Vermeer and Kregting (2020) articulated that the outbreak of pandemic has increased the faith of religious adherents and brought them closer to God and religion. Through a religious perspective, a pandemic is sent as warning to mankind to constantly take notice on and conform to the good deeds based on religious values and teachings (Camus 2012).

As aforementioned, the large-scale outbreak of infectious diseases has implicitly been implied in the Qur'an and explicitly stated in the Hadith (Al Eid & Arnaout 2020). Al Eid and Arnout (2020) emphasised that during a pandemic crisis as a form of widely spreading epidemic, Allah is in control, which, thus, requires our spiritual wellness as a pivotal part of protection against the widespread infectious disease and time of crises. This notion is in conformity with the opinion of Ahmad and Ahad (2020) that proper protection in the face of an epidemic shall not only cover scientific attempts but also embrace spiritual aspects. Spiritual protection is deemed crucial for providing psychological self-healing for human beings through the firm belief of God as the only power to end suffering and diseases. Pursuant to this explanation, Wujtewicz et al. (2020) highlighted that the end of 2019 has witnessed the far-reaching outbreak of COVID-19 throughout the world, which has impacted people from all walks of life. The COVID-19 pandemic is known to induce a high mortality rate because it mainly attacks the respiratory system. The case fatality rate even soars for the elderly, pregnant women and patients with symptomatic complications (Li et al. 2020).

Islam denotes the substantial implication of taking care of health for the sake of the self and others (Yaqub, Rana & Aukrust 2020). This statement implies Islamic virtues to protect mankind as a way to avoid death and diseases (Ashraf et al. 2020). Ashraf et al. (2020) then accentuated the

advice of Prophet Muhammad to his friends to constantly take care of their health by warning them from visiting places with rampant spread of pandemics and epidemics. This direction is in line with the narrative presented by Ahmad and Ahad (2020), which states that the long practiced Islamic hygienical jurisprudence has regulated Muslims to maintain ritual cleanliness for their whole lives. Allah states in the Qur'an, 'And clean your clothes' (Qur'an, al-Mudatsir [74]:4) to remind Muslims to keep them clean. Muslims are required to maintain cleanliness in their daily lives through *wudlu* (ablution) by way of washing their hands, mouth, nostrils, arms, head and feet three times with water and *ghusl* (bathing) of the whole body three times with water. On this basis, Islam perceives pandemic in two perspectives. Firstly, a pandemic is a catastrophe, which 'is definitely true' according to the *sunnatullah* (Divine law), and it can only happen with Allah's permission (Maulana 2020). Secondly, a pandemic shall be understood as a large-scale widespread of disease. Therefore, Islam has also provided a special dispensation for children, pregnant women and patients of chronic diseases such as diabetes mellitus, kidney failure, heart disease, lung disease and cancer not to fast during Ramadhan, because people with these conditions are at high risk of the SARS-CoV-2 virus transmission during this pandemic (Yaqub et al. 2020). Syahid (2020) also expressed how mosques in Indonesia have taken physical distancing measures in congregational prayers to prevent the spread of COVID-19, which is contrast to what is performed in British Muslim community who prefer mosque closure (Al-Astewani 2021).

Pesantren and pandemic

As one of the countries with the largest Islamic education centres in the world, Indonesia has more than 10 000 *pesantrens*, 37 000 madrasas and 5.7 million madrasa *santri* (Tolchah & Mu'ammar 2019). Therefore, Indonesia is home to the largest Islamic education system in the world, where thousands of Islamic schools exclusively cater to the educational needs of the children of Muslim households. Two main types of Islamic education institutions in Indonesia are *madrasahs* (Islamic schools) and *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) (Parker & Raihani 2011). *Pesantren* is a typical Indonesian educational institution with five pillars: *kyai*, *santri*, mosques, *kitab kuning* (Classical Islamic books) and dormitory (Dhofier 1982; Madjid 1997). *Pesantren* is a form of educational institution with features distinctive from other schools. The subjects taught in *pesantren* are mainly hands-on subjects based on the interpretation of the *santri* with the *kyai* as the main role model and caregivers (Izfanna & Hisyam 2012; Prawoto et al. 2020).

Pesantren is primarily established to achieve three main missions: firstly, to serve as a religious education institution; secondly, to function as a *da'wah* (proselytising of Islam) institution and thirdly, to act as an institution that empowers the surrounding community (Dhofier 1982). In several aspects, *pesantrens* serve as places to transmit the concept of moral development that are integrated with Islamic sciences (Ilyasin 2020). In line with this, *pesantrens* as social service

institutions, not only play a key role in education but also take a vital part in changing the lifestyle of the community. The distinctive features of the *pesantren* are generally obtained from the interpretation of the *santri*, which become the main focus of the *kyai* (Izfanna & Hisyam 2012). Given the widely ranging aspects of life (from the way of washing to trading) are learned in *pesantren*, the *kyai* is expected to provide *santri* with a holistic learning process by means of evaluation and orientation (Mahfudin 2020). These everyday values are known as the 'path of *santri's* life' (Mustafa et al. 2018).

During a pandemic crisis, *pesantrens* have taken their own preventive measures of SARS-CoV virus transmission as a way to survive by applying the *uzlah* (a Sufi term that means to avoid being with other people) technique and *at-tawazun* (balance) counselling (Arifin & Zaini 2020). The *uzlah* techniques are similar to 'self-isolation' or 'self-quarantine' techniques. This technique is known as a proper method to break the chain of SARS-CoV virus transmission (Bodas & Peleg 2020). Arifin and Zaini (2020) defined *uzlah* as the practice of isolating oneself from the fast pace of worldly matters to live in solitude with the aim of reviving the soul and purifying the thoughts of destructive influences. Arifin and Zaini (2020) added that this is in line with the genuine view of the Sufis, which primarily emphasises on the importance of sanctuary and reduces social interaction with other people. Moreover, *pesantren* also implements *at-tawazun* counselling (a form of Islamic counselling) performed based on religious values (fiqh norms and sufistic life) and the local values of the *pesantren* surrounding. *Al-tawazun* (balance) acts as an accommodative activity to maintain the mental and physical balance of the *pesantren* community. One of the techniques in practicing *at-tawazun* is *riyadah batiniyah* (spiritual endeavour) (by performing prayers, such as *Rokat* prayer [prayer to reject calamities]). Chair (2020) declared that for the Madurese community, the *Rokat* ritual functions as an effort to prevent diseases. Likewise, the *pesantren salafiyah* (*pesantren Tradisional*) is also renowned for the practice of *Gerbat* (mental movement or spiritual action known as *riyadah 'ubudiyah* [worship endeavour] or religious practice as a form of prayer). *Gerbat* is an applicable practice in *pesantren* to maintain mental health and to heal a wounded heart.

Research method

Determining research objects

The selected research subjects consist of three *pesantrens*: *pesantren Krupyak Bantul*, *pesantren An Nur Bantul* and *pesantren Darul Qur'an wal Irsyad Gunung Kidul*. The three research objects were purposively selected by considering three criteria. Firstly, the Quranic *pesantren* provides general education for more than 1000 *santri*. The predetermined number of *santri* is an essential factor to allow the occurrence of mass gathering. Secondly, the *pesantren* is culturally affiliated with the religious organisation Nahdlatul Ulama, which practices rituals of Islamic spirituality in the face of COVID-19. Thirdly, they provide offline education,

although not for the entire number of *santri*, which makes them vulnerable to the transmission of SARS-CoV virus.

Types of research

This is a qualitative research based on the data about the theological views of *pesantren* in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. The approach used is the Phenomenology of Religion offered by Ninian Smart (2000), which looks at religious phenomena with four attitudes, namely, treating phenomena empathetically, comparing the occurring phenomena, entering the worldviews of each *pesantren* and using polymethodic to understand them. Empathy is relevant to the views and attitudes of *pesantren* towards the spread and preventive measures of SARS-CoV virus transmission. The comparison relates to distinctive attitudes of three *pesantrens* in dealing with the spread and preventive measures of SARS-CoV virus transmission. The world view is correlated to the doctrinal and ritual dimensions of three *pesantrens* in the face of COVID-19. Polymethodic emphasises the use of various methods in analysing three *pesantrens* in the face of COVID-19.

Data collection

The research data were obtained in three ways: observation, interviews and documentation. Firstly, observations were made to take a closer look at the actual condition in the Quranic *pesantren* as the research subject in conducting their offline classes in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. This observation was carried out to understand the learning atmosphere in three *pesantrens*, including the daily life of the *santri*, the leaflets on the information about COVID-19, hand washing facilities, bathrooms for *santri*, the learning process of *santri*, bedrooms for *santri*, the transition procedure for *santri* before entering the *pesantren* complex and interactions between *santri* and non-*pesantren* communities.

Secondly interviews by the researchers. They interviewed three research informants: the *pesantren* caregivers, the COVID-19 task force team of *pesantrens* and the *santri*. The *pesantren* caregivers were interviewed to reveal about *pesantren* views on COVID-19, *pesantren* policies related to the classroom learning processes and other measurements taken by *pesantren* to contain the SARS-CoV virus transmission. The members of *pesantren* COVID-19 task force were interviewed to provide information and clarification about the measurements taken by the *pesantren* to ensure a safe and sound learning process amidst the spread of COVID-19. *Santri* were also interviewed to find out how they respond to the various regulations made by the *pesantren*.

Thirdly, documentation in this study encompasses all documents related to COVID-19, such as *pesantrens'* decisions regarding the instructions for *santri* to return home, various appeals about health protocols and *pesantrens'* policies related to reopening of the teaching and learning process. The documentation also took the form of photos of the daily activities of *santri* at the *pesantrens*, the copy of prayers'

recitation, *salawat* and *hizib* recited for the rituals of Islamic spirituality. This documentation serves as an authentic evidence of *pesantrens'* policies in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Data analysis

The analysis was started since the beginning of the study, even shortly after determining the research topic. This process makes it different from quantitative research which places analysis as the last step in the research process after the data collection. Data analysis was carried out by sorting and selecting data related to *pesantren* theological views, implementation of health protocols and rituals of Islamic spirituality carried out by the *pesantren*. This study treats all data and information as equally essential. In other words, no data is positioned as determinant because everything complements each other. Every policy of the *pesantren* regarding the implementation of offline education is closely related to the values shared by each of these *pesantrens*. Therefore, the analysis aims to disclose the concealed meaning behind every action.

Results

This study presents three important findings: the views of *pesantrens* on the COVID-19 pandemic, the applicable adaptation and modification of health protocols and rituals of Islamic spirituality to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic.

The views of the Quranic *pesantrens* on the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic

Three Quranic *pesantrens*, namely, Krapyak, An Nur Ngrukem and Darul Qur'an wal Irsyad Gunung Kidul share the same opinion about the fact that the outbreak of COVID-19 is for real. In other words, they do believe that it is not a myth or a conspiracy as some others who shared doubts about its existence (<https://www.cnnindonesia.com>). Overall, the Quranic *pesantrens* share three distinctive views on the outbreak of COVID-19 (Table 1). Firstly, they deem the COVID-19 pandemic as a catastrophe that may befall upon anyone, both believers and non-believers, including the Quranic *pesantrens*. This accident can only occur because of the will of Allah, as mentioned in the Qur'an, al-Hadid [57]:22, so that people learn about the meaning of patience. Everyone is prone to the transmission of SARS-CoV virus, and at the same time has the ability to avoid it by putting their best efforts in conducting the following steps: maintaining cleanliness, complying with health protocols and having patience (Qur'an, al-Baqarah, [2]:45) and *tawakkal* (surrendering fully to God) (Qur'an, al-Talaq [65]:3).

Secondly, the COVID-19 pandemic is seen as a *bala'* (an ordeal), which is unavoidable in human life, as mentioned by Abdul Haris, Khairun Niat and Nilzam. *Bala'* was intentionally sent down by Allah SWT in order to test one's faith and level of patience, as stated in the Qur'an, al-Baqarah [2]:155. The COVID-19 pandemic is an ordeal that

can befall everyone, good and bad person, including *kyais* and *hafizs* (Qur'an memorisers). Like other pandemics, there is no cure for COVID-19 and there is no exact prediction when it will go away. However, it is necessary to take some preventive measures to contain the transmission of COVID-19 pandemic, amongst others by way of self-isolation. This method of preventive measure against the outbreak of diseases is clearly stated in the hadith of the prophet: people who are residing in an area with the outbreak of a disease shall not leave the area, and people who are residing outside the area shall not enter the area with the pandemic. Even if you have taken the preventive measures, you still contract COVID-19, and this is the destiny of Allah. Then if eventually the person exposed to COVID-19 dies, he is a martyr, as mentioned in the '*sahih hadith* (valid tradition of Prophet Muhammad)'.

Thirdly, COVID-19 is perceived as both a catastrophe and an ordeal for all mankind. This is evidenced by the fact of the high rate of death because of SARS-CoV virus transmission, and the larger number of infected patients, including those who memorised the Qur'an. On this basis, there is no way for all mankind but to put their best effort to avoid the spread of SARS-CoV virus (*ikhtiar* or endeavour) and surrender fully to God for protection (*tawakkal* or surrender to God). To anticipate the ups and downs of the degree of *tawakkal* (surrender), one needs to implement strict health protocols, such as by wearing masks, maintaining cleanliness and implementing physical distance against the crowd. Such health protocols are well applied in the *pesantren*, as Abdul Haris articulated, 'At the Darul Qur'an, we apply two approaches: increasing the amount of time for *dhikr* and applying strict health protocols'. This is in accordance with the moderate view of Nahdlatul Ulama, which stands in the middle by way of synergising between the concept of *tawakkal* (surrender) and *ikhtiar* (endeavour). More than that, the Darul Qur'an considers COVID-19 as a blessing, 'since it provides a way for the *pesantren* to better apply Islamic principles, such as environmental cleanliness, social care and the adoption of a healthy lifestyle'.

As an ordeal and catastrophe, the outbreak of COVID-19 is deemed to comprise wisdom and grace, so that people can help each other and maintain cleanliness. Nilzam revealed that on the one hand, COVID-19 generates wisdom as it encourages humans to stay humble (*tawadu'*) instead of being arrogant, and urges people to help each other, especially the patients infected with SARS-CoV virus. On the other hand, COVID-19 serves as a blessing because those who die on the attempt to recover from the illness will become a martyr, as Khoirun Niat pronounced.

Health protocols in the Quranic *pesantrens*

As President Jokowi called for social restrictions with effect from 15 March 2020, there had been a less conducive learning atmosphere in the Quranic *pesantrens*. The

TABLE 1: The views of the *Quranic pesantrens* on the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic.

Views on COVID-19	Implications	Attitudes	References
Catastrophe	Everyone is prone to the SARS-CoV virus transmission but preventive measurements can be taken. It is necessary to learn about the meaning of patience.	The transmission of SARS-CoV virus can be avoided by putting the best endeavours, such as by way of maintaining cleanliness and complying with strict health protocols.	Qur'an, al-Hadid [57]:22; Qur'an, al-Baqarah, [2]:45; Qur'an, al-Talaq [65]:3.
Bala' (an ordeal)	Everyone is prone to the transmission, including those who memorise the Qur'an. The spread of disease is meant to test the degree of faith.	The disease can only go away on Allah's will. It is suggested to intensify our efforts for <i>dhikr</i> and prayers.	Qur'an, al-Baqarah [2]:155.
Both catastrophe and ordeal	Everyone is prone to the transmission, and he or she may recover or die. COVID-19 is sent down to test the faith and patience.	It shall be faced with the best endeavour to avoid the transmission (health protocols) and by surrendering fully to God (<i>tawakkal</i>), prayer and <i>dhikr</i> .	Qur'an, al-Hadid [57]:22; Qur'an, al-Baqarah, [2]:45; Qur'an, al-Talaq [65]:3.

COVID-19, the coronavirus disease 2019.

situation was worsened by the dramatic increase in confirmed cases of COVID-19, including in Yogyakarta (<https://www.liputan6.com>) and mostly because of the inaccurate media coverage (<https://bisnis.tempo.co>). Given this condition, Pondok Krupyak and Darul Qur'an wal Irsyad decided to halt the learning process and send their *santri*' home on 21 and 22 March 2020, whilst An-Nur Ngrukem did the same on 23 March 2020. This measurement was taken by the *pesantrens* for three reasons. Firstly, it was carried out to accommodate the number of requests from the parents of the *santri* to send the *santri* home for the sake of their safety. Secondly, the measurement was taken to meet the recommendation from the government. Thirdly, it was performed to comply with the circular letter from the PBNU (The Nahdlatul Ulama Central Board) Rabithah Ma'ahid Islamiyah (RMI or Assosiation of Islamic *pesantren*), advising the *pesantrens* to send their *santri* home, as indicated by the interview with the three *pesantrens'* COVID task force.

The *pesantrens* mainly apply two methods to send their *santri* home. Firstly, the parents or guardians with a letter of authority are required to pick up the *santri*.

Those who were allowed to pick the *santri* up were the families of the *santri* and/or guardians as stated by a letter of authority from the parents of the *santri*. There were 2 posts for picking up the *santri*, namely the pick-up post for male *santri* and the pick-up post for female *santri*. Pickers were prohibited from entering the *pesantren* area, and thus were only permitted to wait outside the front gate of the pick-up post. (male, 26 years old, COVID team in *pesantren*; female, 42 years old, *pesantren* leader; female, 41 years old, teacher)

Secondly, *santri* were escorted to their respective areas using rented cars.

The management grouped the *santri* based on their area of origin and drove them to their respective homes using a rented car.

Thus, the *santri* could go home using the same vehicle with their fellow *santri* who come from the same area. (male, 46 years old, teacher)

These two methods of sending the *santri* home are expected to ensure that *santri* will arrive at their respective homes safe and sound as a way to avoid the transmission of SARS-CoV virus.

However, after about 2 months, the *santri* being home, four new problems emerged. Firstly, countless number of parents worried about the negative circle of friends in their surrounding environment at home that might affect their children, in addition to the negative effects of the uncontrolled use of gadgets. Secondly, the *santri* were fed up with staying at home for too long without having any effective learning activities. Thirdly, there had been an increasingly ineffective process of memorising the Qur'an for the *santri* with the online model. The use of online technology enabled the *santri* to 'manipulate' their mastery of Quranic verses. For instance, 'The *santri* were seemed fluent during the recitation of Qur'an memorization because they directly read the Quran placed in front of them, instead of memorizing it' (An interview with Esti Wuryanti and Akhyar). Fourthly, the community living in the surrounding environment of *pesantrens* were suffering from deprived welfare and economic hardship as the *santri* returned home. These four problems underpin the reason for *pesantrens* to ask the *santri* to return to *pesantrens*.

Despite the alarming number of confirmed cases, *pesantrens* decided to start the offline teaching and learning process at *pesantrens* by complying with the COVID health protocol. Prior to the offline learning implementation, *pesantrens* were required to obtain official permission from the government for the offline learning to take place, even though it was not made fully effective. Offline learning official permission is only granted to *pesantrens* with a full supporting system for implementing health protocols, such as the COVID-19 task force, quarantine places and the standard learning process during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The *santri* returned to *pesantrens* in stages based on the capacity of the quarantine room of *pesantren*. Before departing to *pesantrens*, the *santri* were required to have a self-quarantine at homes for 2 weeks and upon their arrival at *pesantrens* they had to undergo another 14 days of self-quarantine before carrying out their daily activities in *pesantrens*.

Prior to the quarantine process at the *pesantrens*, the *santri* were screened and were required to apply strict health protocols, such as bathing and changing clothes, washing dirty clothes in a destined laundry. (male, 39 years old, *pesantren* leader; male, 26 years old, COVID team in *pesantren*)

Having completed the quarantine period at *pesantrens* for 14 days, the *santri* began to do their regular activities in *pesantrens*, just like the regular activities before the strike of COVID-19. The only difference lies at the requirement to apply strict health protocols in all activities. For instance,

santri were required to wear masks during the learning activities or when participating in other activities, such as performing arts and beauty contests. In addition, the *pesantrens* also forbade *santri* from making a direct contact with outsiders, including the parents of the *santri*. According to Amiq and Yustin Amalia,

Santri were prohibited from interacting with parties outside pesantrens, even the guardians were not allowed to visit santri. Instead, the regular visit session was replaced with virtual visit. Violating this policy means the santri have to return home. (female, 22 years old, teacher)

The same rules also apply to other Quranic *pesantrens*.

To keep their immune system, *santri* are required to do some activities for fun as a way to keep them happy and cheerful, such as miscellaneous sports, gymnastics, sunbathing, the practice of creative writing (poetry and short stories) and painting. Moreover, *pesantrens* also improve the *santri's* diet by adding some nutrients, such as side dishes and milk (Amiq, Yustin and Esti).

Spiritual protective measures from the coronavirus disease 2019

The coronavirus disease 2019 is a creature sent by Allah that operates according to His commands. If Allah has predestined someone to be infected by the virus, he would still contract the disease no matter what he did to protect himself, even if he applied strict health protocols against SARS-CoV virus. Likewise, a person who contracts the disease will not certainly die if he is not destined to die. On this basis, apart from adopting strict health protocols as a contextual protective measure, *pesantrens* also apply

spiritual protective measures against the spread of SARS-CoV virus.

Three *pesantrens* have applied their own distinctive spiritual protective measures (Table 2), which ranged from prayers, *salawat* recitation and *hizib*. The different types of spiritual protective measures are entirely depended on two aspects: the traditional rituals of Islamic spirituality in each *pesantren* and the rituals specifically prescribed by the *pesantrens'* caregivers in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.

For instance, *pesantren* An-Nur regularly applies three rituals to ward off the spread of COVID-19. Firstly, *santri* are required to intensify *salawat* recitation for the Prophet which reads *Allahumma Shalli ala Sayyidina Muhammad wa `ala Alihi wa Ashhabihim ajma`in* (literary meaning: O Allah, give mercy (compassion) and salvation to the Prophet Muhammad) after each *Fardhu* (obligatory) prayer. Secondly, *santri* shall recite *thibbil qulub salawat* (prayer for healing of illness) regularly after performing the *Asr* prayer. Thirdly, *santri* are encouraged to recite more *Istighfar* (ask God for mercy). People who recite *salawat* and *istighfar* are believed to be protected by Allah from the SARS-CoV virus, as Allah says in the Qur'an, al-Anfal (8):33, *And Allah would not punish them while you were amongst them. Allah will not punish them (either) while yet they ask for forgiveness.* 'If in the past the physical presence of Prophet Muhammad prevented people from punishments (*adhab*), the recitation of *salawat* is an effort to present the Prophet Muhammad to protect us against the escalating spread of the COVID-19 transmission in the nearby surrounding,' said Niat (male, 39 years old, *pesantren* leader).

TABLE 2: Spiritual protective measures from the coronavirus disease 2019.

Pesantren	Time	Recitation
Krapyak	Maghrib	<i>Asma' bismil</i> (Prayer to reject calamities) one time The Qur'an, Al-Ikhlas three times The Qur'an, al-Falaq one time The Qur'an, al-Nas one time Ayat Kursi (Al-Baqarah, 255), one time <i>Salawat tola' bala</i> one time <i>Salawat Thibbil Qulub</i> (Recitation asking for health), 11 times
	After five prayers (<i>Fardlu</i> prayers)	The Qur'an, al-Insyirah seven times
	After Maghrib and Shubuh prayers	<i>Hasbiya Allah</i> (Allah is sufficient for me), 10 times
	At any time or not restricted to a certain schedule	<i>Shalat sunnah mutlak</i> (additional prayers that are not bound by time)
	Drinking water	Recitation of prayers for the drinking water
	Every Ashr	Recitation of <i>Ratib al-Haddad</i> (the name of a collection of prayers), as many as possible Recitation of Salawat Thibbil Qulub (asking for health), as many as possible
	At any time	Recitation of <i>Salawat Muhammadiyah</i> (prayer to the prophet Muhammad) as many as possible
Pesantren An-Nur	Every night	<i>Syamt al-Durar</i> (Prayers and praise to the prophet), one time
	After Shubuh prayer	<i>Wirid Latif, Ratib al-Imam</i> and <i>Hizib Nawawi</i> (the name of a collection of prayers), one time
	After five prayers (<i>Fardhu</i> prayers)	<i>Hizib bahr</i> (Prayer asking Allah for help), one time
	After Maghrib prayer	<i>Ratib Haddad</i> (the name of a collection of prayers), one time
	Morning ceremony	<i>Asmaul Husna</i> (the names of Allah) and <i>hizib bahr</i> (Prayer asking Allah for help), one time
	Prior and After Shalat Tahajjud	<i>Asmaul Husna</i> , (the names of Allah) one time
	Tuesday evening	<i>Salawat Muhammadiyah</i> (prayer to the prophet Muhammad) and <i>Burdah</i> (prayers and praise for the Prophet Muhammad) one time.
	Thursday evening	<i>Tahlil</i> (the recitation of <i>La ilaha illa Allah</i>), The Qur'an, <i>Yasin</i> ; <i>Maulid al-Barzanji</i> (praise to the prophet's family), one time

Pesantren Krupyak applies two types of Islamic rituals: the ritual in congregation and individual rituals. The rituals in congregation are conducted after maghrib prayer by reciting *Bismillahi La ya dhurru Ma'a ismih'i syay'un fi al-ardh wa la fi al-sama wa huwa al-sami 'al-'alim* (Prayer asking God for protection), one time, The Qur'an, al-Ikhlas three times, al-Falaq once, Al-Nas once and Ayat Kursi once. After each *fardhu* prayer, *santri* recites *Allahumma Shalli 'ala sayyidina Muhammad wa 'ala Ali sayyidina Muhammad Sholatan tadfa'u biha 'anna al-tha'na wa al-tha'un ya man arada syai'an an yaqula lahu kun fayakun* (*salawat* recitation to reject the pandemic) (11 times, in addition to the unrestricted recitation of the *thibbil qulub* (recitation asking for health) prayer. The individual ritual of spirituality includes the recitation of Surah al-Insyirah seven times after each *Fardhu* prayer, recitation of the *hasbiya Allah La ilaha illa Huwa `alaihi tawakkaltu wa huwa rabbul' arsy al-'azhim* (Surrender prayer to God) and 10 times after Maghrib prayer and Shubuh prayer and performing Sunnah Mutlaq prayers (additional prayers that are not bound by time) and *dhikr* (Islamic recitation to remember God). The recitation in the prescribed rituals is derived from the *ijazah* (a prescribed recitation) from two religious women leaders, Ida Fatimah Zainal and Hannah from Lirboyo Kediri. In addition to these readings, *santri* are also provided a drinking water containing the prayers as part of protective measurements from the COVID-19 outbreak. (female, 42 year old, pesantren leader; male, 46 years old, pesantren leader; female, 22 years old, teacher)

When a *santri* is confirmed COVID-19 positive, the intensity of the ritual is increased and another recitation is added. They perform the prayer rituals after all 5 times of *Fardhu* Prayers, recite the *thibbil qulub* prayer 7 times and al-Fatihah 3 times by repeating the verse *iyyaka na'budu wa iyyaka nasta`in* (You 'alone' we worship and You 'alone' we ask for help) 11 times, whilst inwardly intending to ask Allah for recovery. This practice is believed to strengthen the body's immune system and a form of healing treatment. Given these rituals, all *santri* who were confirmed positive could recover from the disease, even though the recovery time varied. Some *santri* immediately recovered after three days, some recovered in seven days, some even took up to fourteen days to recover (an interview with Yustin).

Pesantren Darul Qur'an wal Irsyad practices several kinds of rituals as protective measurements against the outbreak of COVID-19 (Figure 1), namely, (1) *Wirid Latif, Rotib Imam* and *Hizib Nawawi* (the name of a collection of prayers), recited one time after the Fajr prayer, (2) *hizib bahr* (Prayer asking Allah for help) recited one time after the *Fardhu* prayer, (3) *Ratib Haddad* (the name of a collection of prayers) recited one time after Maghrib prayer, (4) *Asmaul Husna* (The names of Allah) and *hizib bahr* recited one time in every morning ceremony before starting the daily activities in *pesantren*, (5) *Asmaul Husna* one time before and after the midnight prayer, (6) *Salawat Muhammadiyah* and *Burdah* every Tuesday evening and (7) *Tahlil* (the recitation of *La ilaha illa Allah*),



Source: Darul Qur'an Islamic Boarding School

FIGURE 1: Collection of prayers recited at the Darul Qur'an Islamic Boarding School.

Yasin and Maulid al-Barzanji (praise to the family of the Prophet Muhammad) every Thursday evening. These readings are a prescribed recitation from Sayyid Alwi Al-Maliki as a teacher of KH Kharis Marzuki, caretaker of Pesantren Darul Qur'an wal Irsyad (an interview with Akhyar and Esti Wuryani).

Discussion

This research shows the distinctive and unique mechanism of *pesantrens* in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. This fact is indicated by three points. Firstly, COVID-19 is a catastrophe and an ordeal for all mankind that must be addressed with the best physical and mental effort. Secondly, such effort is applied in the health protocols applied by *pesantrens* whilst sending the *santri* home at the early outbreak of the COVID-19, the procedures to welcome *santri* who return to *pesantrens*, the learning process and the daily life of the *santri* at the *pesantrens* during the pandemic situation. The applicable health protocols are adjusted according to the needs and local context of each *pesantren*. Thirdly, *pesantrens* also apply spiritual endeavours through the recitation of certain verses in the Qur'an, prayers, *hizib* (a collection of certain prayers) and recitation of prayers for drinking water. These three points indicate the comprehensive approach of Quranic *pesantren* in dealing with COVID-19. This practice confirms what has been shown by Cohen (2021) and Mosqueiro et al. (2020) that religion, in this case *pesantren*, emphasises theology of health in providing students with spiritual calm and peace. It also strengthens Sam D. Gill's notion that the Qur'an as a holy book, not only has an informative function but also has a performative function. Whilst the first function emphasises on the instructions of the Quranic verses to maintain health, the second concerns on the practice of using the verses of the Qur'an as a means of healing through recitation and writing. It is clear that the spiritual practices applied by the *santri* of the three *pesantrens* act as the performative function of the Qur'an (Denny & Taylor 1985).

The comprehensive approach of these *pesantrens* in dealing with COVID-19 is a manifestation of authentic faith shared by many *pesantrens*. This authenticity is obtained from the viewpoint of these Quranic *pesantrens* that SARS-CoV virus is Allah's creature who only works on His orders. This view pinpoints a synergy between divine and worldly reasoning amongst *pesantrens* in responding to SARS-CoV virus. Worldly reasoning is demonstrated by the contextual application of health protocols to avoid the malignancy of SARS-CoV virus. Meanwhile, divine reasoning is reflected in the implementation of prayer – Islamic rituals of spirituality. These rituals, as also mentioned by Chair (2020), are intended to shape an attitude of patience and submission which is believed to increase body immune system as a protective measure against the spread of SARS-CoV virus. This fact proves that Quranic *pesantrens* have their own distinctive systemic and comprehensive view and way of dealing with SARS-CoV virus, which is different from the widely shared medical perspective that positions SARS-CoV virus as a

threat to be contained, controlled and conquered with the injection of COVID-19 vaccine.

The comprehensive and systemic approach of three *pesantrens* in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic illustrates that *pesantrens* – to borrow a quote from Evans-Pritchard (1965) and Salehudin (2018) – have their own rationality. This rationality is obtained from the worldviews of the Quranic *pesantrens* in attempting to regain their daily regular activities as in the normal condition. The shared belief of these Quranic *pesantrens* that SARS-CoV virus is a God's creature and only works according to His orders makes them apply a different measurement from the general health protocols and government policies. These measurements prevent these Quranic *pesantrens* from excessive fear about the spread of SARS-CoV virus because the spread of the virus will only take place in accordance with Allah's will and orders. Nonetheless, they consider that modified health protocols and special rituals of necessity as a manifestation of patience and endeavour against the ordeal and catastrophe sent down by Allah.

The distinctive feature of this study when compared with the previous studies on COVID-19 lies on the uniqueness of Quranic *pesantrens* as a subculture that have their own way of coping with the spread of SARS-CoV virus. Whilst the previous studies were inclined to address the correlation between the spread of SARS-CoV virus and *pesantren* in terms of management, learning models and economic empowerment in the time of COVID crisis, this study showcases the theology of health of Quranic *pesantren* based on local wisdom and creativity in dealing with COVID-19. The distinctive protective measurements against the spread of COVID-19 applied by Quranic *pesantrens* indicate their own meaningful values and their own theology of health which prevent *pesantrens* from excessive worries in living a normal life amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

The theology of health of these *pesantrens* may serve as an alternative role model for the public at large in dealing with the spread of SARS-CoV virus in a rational, productive and innovative manner. On this basis, the theology of health model of *pesantren* may be deemed as a considerable alternative to be included in government policy in dealing with the transmission of COVID-19. This policy allows the government to touch the spiritual aspect of the public to prevent them from excessive fear about this pandemic.

Conclusion

The results of this study denote that the theology of health of *pesantren* is an appropriate reference for other *pesantrens* in Yogyakarta in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Three Quranic *pesantrens* in Yogyakarta applied a comprehensive approach through modified health protocols adjusted to the local context of the *pesantren*. In addition, they also performed spiritual endeavours by reciting the verses of the Qur'an, *salawat* of the Prophet, *hizib* and prayers. This approach was

taken based on the view shared by these Quranic *pesantrens* that COVID-19 is a divine being who works only on His orders. The distinctive protective measures taken by these Quranic *pesantrens* are a manifestation of the *pesantren* as a subculture that has its own local wisdom in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. This point delineates a transformation of health theology amongst *pesantrens*. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, *pesantrens* tended to apply a nearly fatalistic theological view, but the numerous victims of COVID-19 have turned the fatalistic theological view of the *pesantren* into a rational-transformative theological view as indicated by the external and internal efforts of *pesantren* in dealing with COVID-19 (<https://www.duniasantri.co/suddenly-jabariyah/>).

The results of this study serve as a beneficial input for policymakers in formulating a comprehensive strategy in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. Efforts to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic shall not only adhere to technical, procedural and medical health protocols but also embrace the spiritual values adopted in society. It is essential to apply this strategy to avoid community resistance in the policymaking regarding the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. This way is expected to urge community participation through efforts in coping with COVID-19 with a better efficacy.

Nevertheless, this study has two limitations: firstly, it only examines three *pesantrens* located in Yogyakarta and, secondly, it excludes the surrounding community of the *pesantrens*. Thus, it is expected that further research will consider examining some non-Quranic *pesantrens* located in Yogyakarta and outside Yogyakarta, especially *pesantrens* which become the clusters of the COVID-19 pandemic. This way is projected to generate more reliable picture as an approach to formulate the theology of the health of *pesantrens*.

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Authors' contributions

All listed authors contribute to this article. A.B. wrote the original draft, reviewed and edited it. A.S. conceptualised the study and managed the project administration. A.M. was responsible for the methodology and validation. S.Z.Q. wrote the formal analysis and compiled the resources. N.H. wrote the visualisation and supervised the project.

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