**Research Article**

# Voices from inside Dayah Culture: Using Photovoice to Explore Lives of Indonesian Muslim Female Adolescents

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**Abstract**

*This study explored the living experience of female adolescents in an Islamic boarding school (dayah) in Aceh Province, Indonesia. This article is part of a critical ethnographic study which was conducted using photovoice as its main data collection method, involving 34 female adolescents as key participants. Two focus group discussions and three in-depth interviews were conducted using photo interviewing with seven key participants. The initial themes from photo interviewing were then further explored via additional data collection with all key participants and five associate participants to ensure comprehensive and saturated data. Four themes emerged from the findings as follows: hardship of studying, stringent and austere living arrangements, barriers to health care access, and regulation and punishment as strategies for expected behavior change. The study showed that photovoice is very useful for researching this specific culture of Muslim female adolescents. Photovoice revealed the sensitive issues of this culture while empowering the participants through the research process. The study shed light on how dayah culture can restrict the ability of female adolescents to improve their health. The findings confirmed that photovoice can provide rich data. It also gave the female adolescents a sense of autonomy, making them more vocal in calling for positive change.*

**Keywords**: critical ethnography; female adolescent; islamic boarding school; muslim; photovoice

## Introduction

Photovoice has been increasingly used over the last decade as a visual research method. It is the most common method to conduct a power-balanced study.[1] In addition, photovoice shows strong evidence of its capability to enhance understanding about the assets and needs of a community and to contribute to its empowerment,[2] as well as to facilitate actions to transform community change.[3,4] Photovoice has been employed to address many issues in adolescents such as health,[5,6] and vulnerable populations.[7]

Among Indonesian Muslim youths, one group which might be more vulnerable than others is that of female adolescents residing and studying in an Islamic education institution called pesantren. Pesantren are a part of Indonesia's Islamic education system, generally providing six years of teaching by combining Islamic junior high school and Islamic high school in

one integrated institution.[8] The Indonesian education system provides for 12 years of compulsory schooling, divided into three phases: six years of elementary school (ages 6-12 years), followed by three years of middle or junior high school (ages 12-15 years) and three years of senior secondary or high school (ages 15-18 years).[9]

Pesantren have an image of a second-class school and "dumping ground" for children from poor rural families.[10] At pesantren, students live in a specific environment in which they adhere to Islamic values, norms, and cultures.[11] Besides, female youths are more prone to experience gender-based inequalities which limit their ability to protect their health.[12]

Of the 27,290 pesantren operating in Indonesia in 2013, 51.13% were integrated pesantren and the rest were traditional pesantren.[13] At traditional pesantren, the core principle of education is the delivery of the teachings of classic Islamic books (kitab), without including conventional subjects such as natural science, social studies, or arts and sports in the curriculum. Integrated pesantren on the other hand include such subjects by applying the national curriculum designed for regular Islamic junior or senior high schools.[14] A classic ethnography conducted in the first established integrated pesantren in Indonesia described in detail what life inside the pesantren was like. In the study, a male only pesantren was depicted as an education complex consisting of several dormitories for students, separate houses for teachers, and a mosque. The students studied and resided at the pesantren during their six years of study, and were subjected to a discipline of full day's activities. The student activities were strictly scheduled, starting from early morning until late evening. Similar phenomena could still be observed at the time of this study.[15] In order to portray the life of female adolescents in current integrated pesantren, this study was conducted in Aceh province, the only autonomous province in Indonesia which has implemented sharia, the basic Islamic legal system which covers all aspects of the Muslim way of life, such as acts of worship, family law, civil law, and education.[16] In Aceh, the term of dayah is commonly used to refer to pesantren. The province had 1,216 registered dayah, 43.42% of which were integrated dayah.[13] However, this large number of dayah did not come along with good quality, as students experienced inadequate access to educational resources, basic necessities and personal health.[17] This study aimed to explore how female adolescents lived in an integrated dayah with limited facilities which strictly applied sharia law and was situated in a rural, low-income, rice-farming community. The findings highlight and emphasize female adolescents' concerns and considerations which should be taken by school policy makers, as well as health professionals, to set up compatible health improvement programs for female adolescents living in dayah.

## Aim of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore the concerns associated with living in the relatively closed environment of a dayah in Aceh province, Indonesia, as they were perceived by the female students. The study's findings were expected to provide new knowledge, contributing to more culturally compatible development strategies which could initiate positive changes.

## Methods

### Design

The study's design is critical ethnography, employing photovoice as a main data collection research method to elicit female adolescents' living experiences through photo taking and photo interviewing in focus group discussion or individual interview settings. In-depth interviews and participant observations were conducted as additional methods

to collect data from female adolescents, as well as the principal and teachers at the dayah.

**Setting**

Pesantren in Aceh are commonly addressed as "dayah", for both traditional and integrated pesantren. However, people could differentiate that some dayah, namely those that were integrated pesantren, also provided formal education in the morning, while some dayah focused only on teaching kitab. In this article, the word dayah will be used to refer to integrated pesantren in order to reflect the local Acehnese context.

The dayah in this study was selected due to its accessible location and its permissible culture of accepting non-Muslim or Muslim outsiders to visit the school. The dayah, which was located in a rural area of one district of Aceh province, was established in 1966, when it began as a small place to facilitate "mengaji" (reciting Quran) for children and adults. After the tsunami disaster which devastated the province in 2004, this dayah began receiving refugee students from affected areas in Aceh. As a consequence, it eventually grew into a pesantren with support from surrounding communities and several donations from government and non-government organizations. The dayah consisted of the building for classrooms and teaching activities, including a library, laboratories and offices for teachers, mosques, student dormitories, teacher's house, student's basic facilities and rooms for extracurricular activities. This dayah had 117 students, 48 female and 69 male, from various districts in Aceh. Teaching staff consisted of 31 ustadzs (male teachers) and 35 ustadzahs (female teachers). Some of the teachers resided in the teacher's house or shared the same room with the students to act as students' chaperones.

**Participants Recruitment**

The participants of the study were recruited by using purposive sampling. The key participants consisted of 34 female adolescent students (aged 12 to 19) who were articulate in sharing their experiences and willing to participate in the study. The dayah principal, 2 ustadzs, and 2 ustadzahs were involved as associate participants who provided general information related to curriculum, teaching and learning activities, infrastructure, facilities, and regulations of dayah. The data provided by the associate participants also helped triangulate the data given by the female adolescents, and contribute to building an overall picture of the life inside the dayah.

An initial recruitment of the participants was facilitated by an ustadzah, and then further recruitment was conducted using the snowball method. The first four participants, who were selected by the ustadzah, subsequently introduced the other students to the principal researcher. The principal researcher informed them about the study and asked for their consent to participate in the study.

At the first meeting with the female dormitory chaperone and selected participants, the principal researcher introduced herself as an Acehnese Muslim nurse and explained the objectives and process of the study to the students. The participants and chaperones were encouraged to ask questions and discuss the study among them. A written explanation was also provided to each student and the chaperone. The principal researcher was also introduced to the dress code for visitors to this dayah. As a female Muslim nurse, the principal researcher was asked to wear a long skirt, long sleeve shirt, and hijab a veil covering head, neck and chest at all times during the visits. As an Acehnese, the principal researcher was familiar with Islamic values as they are closely embedded in

Acehnese culture, yet had never experienced the stricter Islamic culture of a dayah.

**Data Collection**

Data collection methods consisted of in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observations. The collection of data was planned into two parts. The first part was conducted with seven key participants using photovoice as the main data collection method through independent photo taking by and photo interviewing of the participants. The second part consisted of an additional nine focus group discussions (FGD) conducted with all key participants (N=34) and five in-depth interviews undertaken with all the associate participants. The principal researcher, who collected the data, had experience in qualitative data collection and analysis during her training in advanced qualitative data analysis course as part of her doctoral study. She also had experience in applying a photovoice approach with adolescent groups in community settings.

The first part of data collection started with the photo taking process. The principal researcher gave a digital camera to the participants and assigned them to individually take photographs of any persons, places or events they perceived being related to how they lived their lives in their school or dormitory over a period of five days. Students decided which photographs they wanted to share in discussions and gave their written consent to their anonymized being used and published as part of this study. The student voluntarily selected which photographs could be used and published preserving their anonymity. Depending on their preference, they could discuss their selected photos either in FGD or individual in-depth interviews. There were two FGDs and three in-depth interviews conducted using photo interviewing, the average duration being one to one and a half hours. They were asked questions to describe what the photographs were about, the persons or objects in them, the reasons why they had taken the photographs, and how they felt about each of the selected photos. The initial themes from photo interviewing were then further explored in the second part of data collection.

In the second part of data collection, an additional nine FGDs were conducted with all key participants, followed by five in-depth interviews with all the associate participants. This second part of data collection necessarily ensured the collection of comprehensive and replicated data. The data were collected using Bahasa Indonesia and recorded with a tape recorder or video camera with permission of the participants.

Participant observation was also performed over the duration of six months between January and June 2014. During participant observation, the principal researcher joined the students whenever possible, while simultaneously observing how they performed their daily routine, and asking additional questions to verify the observation data and to triangulate with the data collected by using FGD and in-depth interview. This included morning and evening classes, religious, extracurricular activities and any activities that they did between their schedule during the school days, as well as during their day off school. While other schools in Indonesia are closed on Sundays, the dayah have their day off school on Fridays.

**Data Analysis**

The data were transcribed verbatim and managed using NVivo 10.[18] All transcripts, audio files, photos and secondary data were uploaded to this qualitative software data management system. This study used pragmatic horizon analysis to analyze the data. Pragmatic horizon analysis is a process of recognition of meaning through the activity of position taking.[19]

An initial analysis of the original data from photo interviewing was conducted in Bahasa Indonesia by the principal researcher. Additional data collected using FGD, in-depth interview and participant observation with all key participants and five associate participants were further analyzed and merged with the initial themes. The transcripts of the first two FGDs and all initial analyzed data were translated to English by the principal researcher and a Muslim bilingual translator who shared the same culture with the participants. Another bilingual translator back-translated to Indonesian, and the final version of the translation was arrived at jointly agreement by the researchers and bilingual translators. The data analysis was performed under periodic consultations with the research team members who were also the thesis advisors. All researchers participated in the systematic data analysis after data collection was completed. The researchers tried to intuit what the participants actually shared beyond the words transcribed, carefully looking for the patterns of their experience, and conducting a number of discussions to develop the coding frame. The discussions highlighted and resolved the areas of disagreement to reach a final coding frame to code the entire data set. The initial themes, subthemes, and meanings were reviewed by the research team to ensure the credibility and saturation of the data. When saturation was achieved, member checks were performed by conducting two FGDs with the key participants to confirm the meaning fields. Eventually, these nuanced meanings were developed into final themes.

In this study, credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability were applied to achieve the trustworthiness of the data. To ensure the credibility of the research findings, the principal researcher spent nine months familiarizing herself with the culture being studied and collecting the data. The data was collected using multiple methods including observation, photo voice method, focus group discussion and in-depth interview. Associate participants were also involved to achieve triangulation. The strategy to achieve dependability was to conduct an inquiry audit by an external reviewer to evaluate the findings. The external reviewer was a qualitative research expert from the College of Nursing, Seoul National University whom the principal researcher consulted during overseas study. Confirmability was also established through member check and peer debriefing technique. The researcher conducted several member checks with key participants at the end of data collection process. For checking possible researcher bias, peer debriefings were performed twice. The first peer debriefing was conducted after the first photovoice by involving PhD students who attended the subject of advanced qualitative data analysis at Prince of Songkla University. The second peer debriefing was performed with PhD students who attended the subject of advanced qualitative data analysis at Seoul National University. In addition, to achieve transferability, the report of the findings was enriched with pictures, the real words of the informants and detailed documentation throughout the study. The detailed findings and the data analysis process were also evaluated by the external reviewer.

**Ethical Considerations**

This study was approved by an Institutional Review Board of Prince of Songkla University, Thailand. Approval for the research study was also obtained from the Syiah Kuala University in Banda Aceh, the local public university where the principal researcher works; and the director of the selected dayah. After the students agreed to participate in the study, they each signed an informed consent form which was countersigned by the chaperone, and which stated that all data would be anonymous. The chaperone also signed an informed consent form for herself. In addition, another consent form related

to the copyright clearance issue of the photographs was prepared for each selected photograph, and the participants could choose whether to allow publication or not. These measures aimed to ensure students' confidentiality and avoid ethical problems in the future. They also were informed that their involvement in this study was completely voluntary, that they could withdraw anytime from the study if they felt uncomfortable, and there would be no consequences in the nursing care they received.

**Results**

In this study, photovoice revealed significant information about the participants and concepts under the investigation. Four main themes emerged representing the participants' core experience of living in dayah culture. These were: hardship of studying, stringent and austere living arrangements, barriers to health care access, and regulation and punishment as strategies for expected behavior change.

**Hardship of Studying**

The students described suffering many hardships while studying, as they had to follow the full day activities inside the dayah. The teaching of general subjects took place in the morning, from 7:30 AM to 1:30 PM, delivering 22 subjects, including the religious subjects. The teaching of classical Islamic books took place from 8:00 PM to 11:00 PM, addressing ten Islamic classical books, including Quran, the Holy Book of Islam. Since three different curricula apply to a dayah, which are the conventional national curriculum, the Islamic educational curriculum, and the dayah curriculum, students had to meet all three respective standards of graduation. In a photo interview, Raisa reflected how the long hours of study affected her:

> *"Yes, it is quite hard. Physically, it is not too hard, but for the mind is such a headache, really a headache. It seems like a never ending burden giving me a headache. For example, during the afternoon while we are already in the morning class for 8 hours, especially after physics, chemistry, math for 3 hours. Then the class continued with other lessons. My head cannot bear it".*

In addition, the society puts high expectations on the dayah students to be religious scholars, and this proved to be one of the participants' biggest concerns. Raisa expressed her worries:

> *"My concern is that I may fail later, after having spent a long time learning kitab (the Islamic classical books). That would be such a waste. However, if after graduating from this school, I could master all the kitabs, that would be really great. Especially for the ones who do not study in traditional dayah, only a few people (who study in integrated dayah) can do it, and that would make me proud".*

In order to meet society's expectation of them, which are the same as those of male students, the female students need to be given the same chance to study or develop their skills. Unfortunately, the dayah did not have many capable ustadzahs to teach Islamic classical books and lead extracurricular activities such as sports with female students. Especially, in the evening class, most of the teachers were male and always stood in the front of male students. The female students, who always sat at the back behind male students (as shown in Figure 1), felt embarrassed to ask questions during the lessons as this was deemed to be culturally inappropriate. It was expected that female teachers would help address any questions the female students might have after class. These findings implied there was an issue with gender inequality in the dayah. Laila expressed her concern about this situation:



**Figure 1.** The female students studying in the mosque for the evening sessions.
The female students sit at back verandah, while the male students sit at the front, inside the mosque.

> "*Since male teachers are generally more qualified, but accessible only to male students, so under such a circumstance female student have lesser opportunity to learn from capable teachers as well as engaging in a wide range of sports and activities. That is what happens all the time. We have been asking to be given more ustadzahs who can teach Islamic classical book and lead extracurricular activities, but until now we did not get them yet".*

Regarding extracurricular activity, the female students described a preferable one managed by an ustadzah and raised their concern related to this matter. Raisa shared her thoughts using a photo taken by herself:

> *"This is one of the extracurricular activities conducted by ustadzah R. I like the one like this. We could sing and have fun. We could distract our mind a bit from our lessons".*
> Laila added:
> *"Yes, I like it too. But we are lacking ustadzahs who could lead us in this kind of activities".*

This statement actually shows that the students enjoyed such distraction activities. They expected an ustadzah to initiate the activities but did not make any effort to do it by themselves.

Moreover, the principal researcher rarely observed the female adolescents performing exercise or sport activities which could also be considered as distraction activities. The only structured exercise observed as a group activity was scheduled for Friday mornings. On the other hand, the boys had many activities, such as football, badminton, and volleyball. According to one of the ustadzahs who taught and stayed in the school, she understood that the students might feel overwhelmed with studying but felt that they should follow the regulation. She mentioned:

> *"I think the students are acquainted with these conditions. But, even if they do not like it, they have to follow it, with ustdazah's guidance. Besides, they also have breaks, like in the afternoon. They should follow the regulation even though I saw them being overwhelmed".*

**Stringent and Austere Living Arrangements**

The participants described their living in the dayah as being full of stringency and austerity. The students had to adjust to the lack of facilities and resources. They had no choice but to share those

limited facilities and resources among themselves. Meanwhile, the strict schedule and regulations of the dayah, for studying and performing religious activities in groups, did not leave much time for them to take care of themselves.

The strict dayah regulations set boundaries for the students to experience the world outside the dayah's environment. They were banned from going outside the school gate, except for acceptable reasons. Even on Friday, which was the dayah day off, they were not free to go outside. In addition, the students were also not allowed to bring in a mobile phone. If they needed to contact their parents, they used the dayah's telephone. There was also no television, radio or newspaper for the students. Those media were available only for the teachers and could only be used by students with their teacher's permission. The students expressed that they experienced limited freedom to access the outside world, even in the nearby community. Hani described:

> *"World inside the dayah is so small. If I have a chance, when Friday comes, I hope that I can get permission to go out to a nearby local market. Just going to there is fine. Hopefully I could take some fresh air. Looking around, the rice fields, forest, that's enough. Then return to the school again".*

Beside limited access to the physical outside world, the students also experienced limited access to information from outside the dayah. This included the use of media communication devices and the internet to keep up with information and social networks. Hani expressed her concern about this condition:

> *"Like our condition, it is so hard to go out. I mean, here, we never learned about the internet. Moreover, the girls are not allowed to go to internet shops outside the school without good reasons. If we do without getting the permission, we will be punished. I wish we could have internet access here".*

**Barriers to Health Care Access**

Many health problems were experienced by the students. The most common ones were fever, headache, stomachache, cold, back pain, toothache, eye diseases, and menstruation problems. Despite all this, the participants were concerned that their health problems were not being treated well in the school. Raisa said:

> *"Sometimes she (the ustadzah who is in charge of the student's health) gives us medicines, and then she goes somewhere else. Sometimes we don't know what to do because she is not around. So we take care of the sick student by ourselves. I think she gives the same medicines for all kinds of diseases".*

The mentioned ustadzah subsequently quit her job, leaving no ustadzah in charge of female students' health. Trying to overcome this problem, the ustadz in charge of male students' health was assigned to also take care of the female students, and two female senior students were appointed to work with him in managing the health care for other female students. However, since gender segregation was applied strictly, the ustadz could not enter the female dorm to take care of the sick female students, and the assigned female students could not directly contact the male teacher when they needed his help. Nora, who was one of the assigned students expressed:

> *"We need a health post that is managed by an ustadzah, because the ustadz who handle the health post now is a male, we cannot directly contact him to seek for treatment".*

This example shows the negative impact gender inequality had on the health of female dayah students. Failure to address problems such as this would perpetuate the neglect of female adolescents' health needs.

**Regulation and Punishment as Strategies for Expected Behavior Changes**

The regulation and punishment in this dayah were found to be hierarchical, respectively from the principal, senior ustadzahs, the head chaperone, ustadzahs, and the student council. The head chaperone, who was also one of senior ustadzahs, assigned the student council to monitor the implementation of dayah regulations under her and several ustadzahs' supervision. Since Islamic values are embedded in every dimension of Muslim daily life, the regulations were made in coherence with sharia law. Several regulations were added to improve the implementation of sunnah (non-compulsory but recommended) practices, making them compulsory behaviors in the dayah. The head chaperone explained:

> *"If we never applied punishment, then things will not work. Sometimes it looks like a very simple thing to do, like brushing teeth. But if they do not do it, they will have toothache. It is going to be a big problem. Then we made those expected behaviors into the regulations. Maybe after doing it in a year, and we continuously implement it like this, they will get used to do it. Later on, it becomes their habit".*

Furthermore, the students perceived this implementation of regulation and punishment as an important thing. Laila clearly stated her opinion about this issue, "punishment is needed, otherwise the students will just do what they want". Her opinion showed that she understood the purpose of regulation and punishment in the dayah.

The findings in this study, in general, showed how gender, religion, and power relations were deeply embedded in the culture of dayah as a part of the Indonesian educational system. Living in such a culture affected female students' ability to meet their educational and health needs, and to achieve their optimum level of growth and development in adolescence. The discussion part will further address these issues.

**Discussion**

Studies about pesantren are an under-researched area, especially the case of dayah in Aceh.[20] Instead of using conventional qualitative research methods as employed by the previous studies on pesantren or dayah and involving only the female religious leaders or scholars,[11,14,20] this study employed a novel research method, photovoice, and involved female students as key participants. Foucauldian theory and Erikson's theory of developmental stages were employed to consider the experiences of female adolescents living in a dayah. Even though Erikson's study of "Identity: Youth and crisis" preceded Foucault's analysis of power relations,[21] a combination of the two approaches was found to be applicable to the discussion of adolescents' living experiences in this study.

The foremost advantage of photovoice revealed in this study was that it could explore a cultural phenomenon more comprehensively than a traditional interview method. By having the pictures and intensive narratives about them, the researcher could understand the phenomena more thoroughly, including the socially-constructed meanings and values within the dayah, which are difficult to reveal in a conventional interview. Photos which are used in photovoice provoke the participants' response, generate a relaxed atmosphere, and are a less formal process for the participants because the photos become the focus of the interview and not the participants.[22] It was also

reported that using photovoice kept the adolescents eager to participate, remaining fully engaged throughout the data collection process and that the data obtained were rich and detailed.[23] Additionally, in the present study, the camera also attracted a lot of attention from the adolescents, far more than it would have in the technology-saturated world outside the confines of the dayah. For these adolescents whose access to such technology was severely restricted, this camera-involved method proved to be a powerful tool to encourage their involvement and make their voices heard.

Photovoice has the ability to draw connections between complex issues and the sophisticated realities[7] as portrayed in this study. These issues and realities which arose from dayah culture in this study were deeply imbued by power relations, religion and gender. The students, who mostly came from poor families, had no choice but to pursue this affordable form of education. They expressed a reluctance to complain about a lack of facilities because they paid very little in school fees, and some students were also in arrears with their payments. Using Foucault's concepts of "regimes of truth" and "power-knowledge relations", regimes of truth and power-knowledge relations are explained in the form of charismatic pedagogy, strict rules, austere conditions, and spare provision of resources in learning were common experiences in pesantren.[11] As the themes emerging from this study show, the Muslim female adolescents in dayah encountered the same experience.

From the perspective of Foucault's 'Rules of Formation', dayah culture could be considered as an official discourse which uses techniques such as regulation, punishment, and normalization to effect what counts as truth and what does not.[24] In addition, a gender imbalance among the teachers and leaders of dayah in Aceh was analyzed as leading to gender inequality in the institution, stating that not only were most dayah (including the one in this study) male-led, and many accepted male students only, but also that in those dayah which did accept both male and female students, ustadz generally taught the higher level classes for both male and female students, and ustadzah taught the low level classes for both.[14] Even among traditional dayah, only few female students could reach the higher level classes, which, in turn, even further reduced the number of female teachers able to teach such classes. While 50% of the overall dayah student population were female, there were only very few female-led dayah.[14] Nevertheless, having a female-led dayah might be a solution to address the gender inequality issues pertaining to the dayah.

This study further suggests that the gender imbalance had hampered female adolescents' ability to fulfill their educational, social and health needs. Compared to their male counterparts, they had less chance to improve themselves at school as well as less chance to get treatment and consultation. The school administrators should consider this issue by facilitating a more gender-balanced study environment to provide a better school climate, which would have important positive effects on adolescents' learning and achievement.[25] In this study, the school principal had gained more understanding and awareness of the students' concerns through the photovoice intervention. He made efforts to improve the study conditions by providing more sport facilities to female students, trying to recruit more ustadzahs to teach the kitab and a female teacher to teach the subject of physical education in the dayah.

From the perspective of Erikson's developmental theory, female adolescents are viewed as developing individuals who move through psychological crisis to establish a coherent sense of identity.[21] The maturational and social forces develop their identity, therefore making the development of an individual's

identity not only a mental, but also a social process.[25] In this study, dayah culture, as one of the social forces, played a big role in shaping female adolescents' identity. In other words, while maturational forces were at work during female adolescents' six years of living in the dayah, the dayah as a social force also concurrently shaped the identity of female adolescents. Dayah determined which sorts of identities were desirable and which were not. The subjugation of their health needs and other gender-biased practices they experienced during their stay in the dayah might subsequently lead them to consider this inequality as an acceptable aspect of their identity.

For the students' health needs, the school should play an important role in protecting adolescents from a range of health-compromising behaviors and conditions.[26] Since schools are considered as a suitable place for health promotion programs, school-based programs such as those implemented toward social relationship problems or life-skills programs might be considered.[27] Furthermore, peer mentoring or peer-led health education might become effective interventions, as adolescents listen more to information from their peers.[27] However, adolescent mentors must receive appropriate training as well as continuous support. Therefore, in this study, the student council that was given responsibility of managing their peers, including those who were in charge of the health post, should be trained properly on how to conduct peer mentoring or education and should be supported on an ongoing basis with good communication and well-planned activities to improve their participation.

Undoubtedly, policies for creating health-promoting schools play a key role in protecting adolescents' health, ensuring they have knowledge, skills, and access to health services.[26] As a way to ensure that school programs and policies meet the adolescents' needs, adolescents themselves must contribute to the planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation processes.[26] Such level of action might take a long time to implement, however, applying the photovoice method, as shown in this study, can have a catalytic effect towards those purposes. Photovoice can raise policy makers' and school board members' awareness of adolescents' problems by creating a space to make adolescents' voices heard and identifying possible strategies for intervention.[28]

For Indonesian culture in general, the social life of women in pesantren was explained as unidentical to the life of Indonesian Muslim women in general.[29] Furthermore, it was argued that the micro-social world of the pesantren directly impacts only specific cultures and principles related to women and women's issue, but that the nexus of women and pesantren nevertheless warranted detailed exploration.[29] Likewise, in this study, the living experience of female adolescents in dayah represented only a small group of Indonesian Muslim female adolescents. However, studying pesantren is definitely important since pesantren have their role as a center of Islamic values reproduction, including notions related to women and gender issues in general. Moreover, with their widespread and extensive networks, pesantren and their leaders are influential in connecting their communities with wider issues such as counterterrorism, women trafficking or domestic violence.[29] The dayah in Aceh plays a similar role to that of the pesantren described above. In addition, this study emphasized that dayah play a significant role to shape the identity of female adolescents. Ensuring that female adolescents can develop a positive identity during their stay in a dayah might bring a great contribution for the community as a whole, since they might become the religious leaders or Islamic scholars of the coming generations.

## Conclusions and Implications

This study applied a critical ethnography approach, which postulates an empowerment process being part of the research. The process of empowerment was manifested by the researchers' exploration of the emic perspective while positioning themselves as and interacting with participants. This process explicated participants' practical understandings, which they themselves might not have been aware of, and through their retrieval facilitating their direction towards for positive change. This study revealed the practical understandings which related to how the participants construct their actions while living in dayah culture. The decision- makers in dayah, as well as the health professionals who are responsible for the delivery of health services for dayah students, ought to pay more attention to the practical understandings which are described in this study's findings in order to direct positive changes for the life of female adolescents in dayah.

This study has sought to explore and raise awareness about the life of female adolescents in dayah. It shows that photovoice is applicable in the Muslim community, especially in dayah culture, to elicit rich information. Not only did the use of photovoice raise awareness of female adolescents' situation by both the dayah administrators and study participants, but also gave the female adolescents a sense of autonomy, making them more vocal in calling for change.

On the other hand, this study has shown the negative impact gender inequality can have on the health of female dayah students. Failure to address problems such as this would perpetuate the neglect of the health needs of female adolescents in dayah. Therefore, one recommendation arising from this study would be for the Acehnese government to call upon or legislate for dayah to make the addressing of female adolescents' health needs one of its priorities.

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## Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## Clinical Resources

- World Assembly on Muslim Youth: URL: http://www.wamy.co.uk/

- The Muslim Youth Project (MYP): http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/about-us/programs-and-initiatives/345?task=view

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