

Sincere Devotion (Ikhlas) And Honor (Izzah) As Protective Factors Against People-Pleasing Behavior: An Islamic Perspective On Authenticity And Adolescent Well-Being

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Resume—People-pleasing among Muslim adolescents stems from their need for acceptance and fear of rejection, a tendency further exacerbated by social media, which links self-worth to digital validation. Islam offers *ikhlas* (sincerity) and *izzah* (dignity) as protective values that help adolescents resist excessive conformity and build psychological resilience. By fostering intrinsic motivation, self-esteem, and a strong sense of identity, these values enable youth to navigate social pressures while maintaining authenticity. Effective development of these traits requires collaboration among families, schools, and communities to nurture a balanced and spiritually grounded Islamic identity. Integrating psychological insights with Islamic teachings provides a holistic framework for promoting adolescents' well-being and authentic selfhood.

Keywords: *Ikhlas*, *Izzah*, People-pleasing, Muslim Adolescents, Islamic Psychology, Character Education.

Abstract—This study examines people-pleasing among Muslim adolescents, characterized by an excessive tendency to seek social approval, particularly in the digital era dominated by social media influences. Such tendencies may undermine intrinsic motivation, reduce autonomy, and hinder the development of a healthy self-identity. This research reviews psychological literature using a qualitative-conceptual approach, including Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory and Erikson's development theory. It integrates them with Islamic teachings on the values of *ikhlas* (sincerity) and *izzah* (honor/dignity). The analysis reveals that *ikhlas* shifts adolescents' orientation from seeking human approval to seeking the pleasure of Allah, thereby strengthening psychological resilience against social pressures. Meanwhile, *Izzah* reinforces self-worth rooted in faith rather than external validation, fostering healthy self-confidence. The findings emphasize that *ikhlas* and *izzah* are in harmony with modern psychological principles, adding a transcendental spiritual dimension that enhances adolescent well-being. This study recommends the active role of parents, educators, and communities in instilling these values through Islamic parenting, character education curricula, and guidance in social media use. Thus, integrating modern psychology and Islamic values can serve as a holistic framework for nurturing resilient, authentic, and potential-driven Muslim youth as part of the golden generation.

Keywords: *Ikhlas*, *Izzah*, People-pleasing, Muslim Adolescents, Islamic Psychology, Character Education.

I. INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is widely recognized as a critical stage of human development, during which individuals undergo biological, emotional, and social changes that shape their identity [1]. This transitional phase is marked by heightened sensitivity to external evaluation and peer approval, rendering adolescents vulnerable to maladaptive behaviors such as people-pleasing or the tendency

to excessively accommodate others [2]. Across both Western and non-Western societies, maintaining an authentic identity while navigating peer dynamics remains a significant concern.

People-pleasing behavior involves excessive compliance with others' expectations, often at the expense of personal needs and values [3]. Although it may appear adaptive, chronic reliance on external approval can undermine autonomy and self-esteem [4]. For adolescents, whose identities are still in formation, this tendency may distort self-concept and limit their capacity for independent decision-making [5].

The digital era further amplifies these challenges by magnifying peer influence through social media. Indicators of popularity such as likes and followers have become markers of self-worth, fostering approval-seeking behaviors that correlate with heightened social anxiety and depressive symptoms [6], [7]. This creates conditions where adolescents increasingly assess themselves through digital validation rather than intrinsic values.

Psychological frameworks help explain this vulnerability. Erikson's psychosocial theory identifies adolescence as the "identity versus role confusion stage," where external pressures may lead to fragile identity development (Erikson, 1993). Similarly, Self-Determination Theory emphasizes the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness as foundations of intrinsic motivation, yet these needs are often compromised in approval-seeking behaviors [8]. However, Western approaches often emphasize individual autonomy without fully considering identity's cultural and spiritual dimensions. In the Muslim context, self-concept is not merely personal but deeply rooted in spiritual values and communal belonging [9]. Thus, a culturally and religiously sensitive framework is required to address people-pleasing tendencies among Muslim adolescents.

Islam offers profound guidance through the concepts of *ikhlas* (sincerity) and *izzah* (dignity/self-worth). *Ikhlas* emphasizes the purification of intention, directing actions solely toward Allah rather than seeking human approval [10]. *Izzah* reflects inner strength and honor grounded in faith, enabling individuals to withstand external pressures [11]. Together, these values provide a foundation for authenticity and resilience.

The Qur'an underscores the importance of seeking Allah's pleasure over worldly recognition, as emphasized in Surah Al-Bayyinah: 5 and Surah Al-Munafiqun: 8. Classical scholars such as Al-Ghazali describe *ikhlas* as the essence of worship and morality [12], while Ibn Qayyim portrays *izzah* as inseparable from reliance on Allah (*tawakkul*) [13]. These perspectives offer a spiritual counterbalance to contemporary psychological theories. Integrating Islamic principles with psychology allows for developing a holistic framework guiding adolescents toward intrinsic motivation and faith-based identity [14]. This integration also aligns with empirical findings demonstrating that Islamic parenting and education significantly enhance adolescents' emotional resilience and self-esteem [9], [15].

The urgency of such integration is reinforced by the rising prevalence of mental health issues among Muslim adolescents. Studies reveal that prolonged exposure to social media pressures is associated with higher levels of stress, low self-esteem, and anxiety [16]. These pressures can undermine their ability to form identities effectively without a firm spiritual foundation. Cultural shifts driven by globalization further complicate this process, as Muslim adolescents are increasingly exposed to values emphasizing secular standards of success, beauty, and popularity [17]. The tension between religious identity and modern influences strengthens approval-seeking behaviors and can erode self-worth if left unaddressed.

Parents and educators face substantial challenges in responding to this reality. Conventional educational approaches often emphasize obedience over the cultivation of psychological and spiritual autonomy [18]. As a result, adolescents may outwardly conform to social or religious norms while internally struggling with dependence on external validation. Integrating *ikhlas* and *izzah* into adolescent education offers a promising alternative. By teaching sincerity as the reorientation of motivation toward Allah, adolescents can shift their focus from peer approval to divine pleasure [10]. Faith-based self-worth equips them with resilience to face rejection and maintain confidence [11].

This educational approach aligns with the goals of Islamic pedagogy, which emphasize holistic development—intellectual, moral, and spiritual [15]. Adolescents nurtured with *ikhlas* and *izzah* are more likely to grow into confident leaders capable of resisting negative peer influences and contributing positively to society. From an academic perspective, exploring the intersection

of Islamic values and psychology enriches both fields: expanding psychology by integrating cultural-spiritual dimensions and revitalizing Islamic studies by demonstrating their contemporary relevance [13]. Such interdisciplinary dialogue is vital to addressing the complex realities of today's Muslim youth.

Therefore, this study positions *ikhlas* and *izzah* as Islam's primary response to people-pleasing tendencies among adolescents. Through synthesizing psychology and Islamic teachings, it aims to propose a conceptual framework that can guide parenting, counseling, and education. Instilling these values is expected to help Muslim adolescents cultivate resilience, authenticity, and self-worth in an era dominated by external validation.

II. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative-conceptual design to integrate Islamic teachings and contemporary psychological theories in understanding the tendency of people-pleasing among Muslim adolescents. This approach was chosen because it effectively explores concepts derived from religious texts and psychological literature without involving field data collection [19], [20].

The primary data sources of this research are authoritative classical Islamic texts, including the Qur'an, Hadith, and the works of influential scholars such as Al-Ghazali and Ibn Qayyim, which discuss the concepts of *ikhlas* and *izzah*. Secondary data were drawn from international journals, academic books, and recent studies on developmental psychology, self-esteem, motivation, and approval-seeking behavior in adolescents [21], [22]. Data collection was conducted through systematic literature searches in databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, ProQuest, and Google Scholar using the keywords "people-pleasing behavior," "*ikhlas*," and "*izzah*." English- and Indonesian-language literature were analyzed to obtain diverse and contextual perspectives [23], [24].

Data analysis employed thematic analysis [25]. The analytical process was carried out in three stages: (1) initial coding to identify key terms, (2) grouping themes into broader domains such as motivation, identity, and resilience, and (3) synthesis to construct an integrative conceptual framework linking Islamic values with psychological theory [26]. This study applied source triangulation to ensure rigor and validity by comparing interpretations from various classical and contemporary scholars and reviewing modern psychology findings. Reflexivity was maintained to minimize potential bias, while ethical considerations were upheld by presenting Qur'anic and Hadith texts contextually and citing scholarly literature transparently [27], [28].

The outcome of this methodology is the development of a conceptual framework that positions *ikhlas* as the foundation of intrinsic motivation oriented toward Allah and *izzah* as the source of faith-based self-esteem. Thus, this study is expected to contribute both to the advancement of academic discourse and to practical applications in education, parenting, and counseling relevant to the needs of Muslim adolescents [8], [29].

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that people-pleasing behavior among Muslim adolescents is not a simple symptom but a complex phenomenon arising from the psychological need for acceptance and the fear of rejection. Leary and Kowalski [3] emphasize that individuals with this tendency often excessively conform to others' expectations, sacrificing their needs and values. This condition has significant implications for adolescents, as their identity development is still fragile and requires reinforcement from within.

This tendency is further exacerbated by the rise of social media, which has drastically transformed patterns of social interaction. Adolescents now link their self-worth to digital popularity indicators such as likes, comments, and followers. This situation makes their self-esteem dependent on unstable and fluctuating digital validation. Miller, Lynam, and Campbell [2] caution that people-pleasing behavior in this modern social context carries serious consequences, such as diminished autonomy and heightened vulnerability to social anxiety and psychological stress.

Erikson [30] explains that adolescence is a critical stage of "identity versus role confusion," where individuals strive to find their sense of self. When adolescents focus excessively on external approval, they risk experiencing identity confusion, making it difficult to distinguish between an authentic self and a social role adopted merely to gain recognition from others. Ultimately, this may cause them to lose direction in building a stable life foundation.

From the perspective of motivational psychology, this phenomenon contradicts Self-Determination Theory developed by Deci and Ryan [8]. The theory asserts that psychological well-being can only be achieved when basic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are fulfilled. Unfortunately, people-pleasing behavior undermines adolescents' autonomy, forces them to rely on external factors, and erodes the intrinsic motivation that should be the primary source of personal growth.

In addressing this issue, Islam offers a strong conceptual framework through the values of *ikhlas* (sincerity) and *izzah* (dignity/self-worth). *Ikhlas* teaches the purification of intention so that every action is directed solely toward Allah rather than seeking human recognition. Al-Ghazali [12] emphasizes that the essence of worship lies in *ikhlas*, cleansing the heart from worldly orientations. Instilling this value frees adolescents from the unstable cycle of seeking social validation. Additionally, Islam reinforces the concept of *izzah*, referring to dignity and self-worth derived from faith. The Qur'an affirms that true honor belongs only to Allah, His Messenger, and the believers (Surah Al-Munafiqun: 8). Farihah [11] highlights the importance of *izzah* in character education, as it cultivates self-confidence independent of public opinion. With *izzah*, adolescents can maintain dignity and remain steadfast in their principles, even when facing social rejection.

The value of *ikhlas* plays a vital role in building psychological resilience. Adolescents who understand *ikhlas* will perceive learning, organizational work, or creative endeavors not merely as efforts for praise or recognition, but as acts of worship to Allah. A sincere student no longer feels pressured solely by exam results but views the pursuit of knowledge as a spiritually meaningful struggle. Meanwhile, *Izzah* strengthens adolescents' courage to uphold their identity, even when it diverges from the majority. An adolescent with *izzah* will not easily conform to negative trends just for acceptance. They realize that their dignity is not determined by digital popularity but by firm faith and conviction. Thus, *izzah* becomes a strong defense against excessive conformity.

When aligned with psychological theories, *ikhlas* can be seen as equivalent to intrinsic motivation oriented toward meaning, while *izzah* reinforces the sense of competence and wholeness of self-identity. Both values align with the basic needs in Self-Determination Theory, yet Islam adds a transcendental dimension that makes them more stable and less susceptible to social fluctuations. Parents play a crucial role in instilling these values. Ghufroon [13] demonstrates that Islamic parenting significantly influences the development of adolescent self-esteem. Parents who consistently emphasize sincerity in intention and provide validation based on character rather than mere achievements help adolescents build confidence that withstands external pressures.

In the school environment, teachers have great opportunities to internalize these values. Nurhidayati [10] underscores the importance of integrating *ikhlas* in education through intention-setting, spiritual reflection, and evaluation focused more on processes than outcomes. Thus, schools become not only centers of academic achievement but also centers of character and spiritual formation. Furthermore, Yusuf and Rahmah [9] stress the role of Islamic parenting in nurturing children's emotional and spiritual intelligence. Collaboration among families, schools, and communities in cultivating *ikhlas* and *izzah* will foster a supportive environment for Muslim adolescents' balanced emotional, intellectual, and spiritual growth.

Social media, often a source of pressure, can also be utilized as a platform for development. With proper guidance, adolescents can be directed to produce beneficial content, express Islamic values, and build a positive digital identity. In this context, *ikhlas* and *izzah* function as internal values and guiding principles for public activity and global interaction. Globalization further complicates identity formation among Muslim adolescents. Sari and Wahyuni [17] emphasize that exposure to secular values such as beauty standards, material success, and popularity intensifies people-pleasing tendencies. Without a strong spiritual foundation, adolescents will struggle to preserve their Islamic identity.

Empirical research on social media also underscores this danger. Keles, McCrae, and Grealish [16] found that excessive social media exposure is closely linked to increased depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem among adolescents. These findings highlight that without value-based interventions, Muslim adolescents face a high risk of mental health crises. From an educational standpoint, Ali and Hassan [18] argue that Islamic pedagogy must go beyond formal obedience toward cultivating spiritual autonomy. Integrating *ikhlas* and *izzah* into curricula means teaching adolescents to think critically while remaining grounded in Islamic values. This approach equips them to navigate the modern world without losing their identity.

Abdullah [15] further notes that Islamic education emphasizing *ikhlas* and *izzah* contributes to shaping a generation that is both highly competitive and rooted in spirituality. This demonstrates a synergy between individual and collective goals in building an outstanding Muslim generation. From an academic perspective, integrating psychology and Islam opens broader interdisciplinary opportunities. Modern psychology gains cultural-spiritual dimensions, while Islamic studies gain renewed legitimacy by demonstrating relevance in contemporary contexts. Ghufroon [13] asserts that such dialogue is crucial in addressing the real challenges faced by today's Muslim adolescents.

These findings affirm that *ikhlas* and *izzah* are not merely abstract theological concepts but also practical strategies for fostering adolescents' psychological and social well-being. Integrating Islamic teachings and modern psychological theory produces a holistic framework for nurturing resilient, confident, and authentic youth.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study affirms that the tendency of people-pleasing among Muslim adolescents stems from the psychological need for acceptance and the fear of rejection, further intensified by digital culture and social media. From a psychological perspective, this behavior weakens intrinsic motivation and hinders the development of a healthy self-identity. However, Islam provides a solution through the internalization of *ikhlas* (sincerity) and *izzah* (dignity), which redirect adolescents' orientation from seeking human approval to seeking Allah's pleasure, while affirming faith-based self-worth. Integrating modern psychological theories, such as Self-Determination Theory and Erikson's developmental theory, with Islamic teachings, a holistic framework can nurture resilience, confidence, and authenticity among Muslim adolescents. These results underscore that *ikhlas* and *izzah* are theological concepts and psychological and social strategies relevant to addressing identity challenges in the digital era.

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