

Transforming Religious Adolescence Toward Moderation: Strengthening Moral Values as an Effort to Prevent Radicalism

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Abstract

This study explores the transformation from religious puberty to religious moderation in the context of individual religious development, particularly during adolescence. Religious puberty is defined as a critical phase in which individuals begin to intensely explore their religious identity, often accompanied by an extreme zeal for religion. However, this phase also presents a vulnerability to radicalism and rigid interpretations of religion. This research is a literature review employing qualitative, descriptive-analytical methods, using Lawrence Kohlberg's moral development theory to analyze the stages of moral transformation that influence an individual's perspective on religion, focusing on the transition from conventional to post-conventional morality. The results show that adolescents in the phase of religious puberty tend to follow religious teachings literally without critical reflection, making them susceptible to extreme ideologies. With proper guidance from family, educators, and religious communities, they can be directed toward a more inclusive and contextual religious moderation. Religious education that emphasizes critical reflection and tolerance plays a vital role in this process. This study contributes to the development of effective religious education strategies to prevent radicalism and foster a more balanced understanding of religion in multicultural societies. The limitations of this research lie in the lack of empirical data across different age and cultural groups, indicating the need for further studies to deepen the understanding of this transformation dynamic in a broader context.

Keywords:

Religious puberty;
Religious moderation;
Moral development;
Lawrence Kohlberg.

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Introduction

Religious moderation has become one of the topics that is increasingly prominent in the discussion of religious practices in the midst of a multicultural and complex society. This concept emphasizes balance in practicing religious teachings, avoiding extreme attitudes in both the form of radicalism and secularism that is too loose.¹ Historically, religious moderation has emerged in various religious traditions. In Islam, this concept refers to the principle *Wasathiyah* or the middle way taught by the Qur'an, QS. Al-Baqarah: 143 that Muslims are "the middle people".² Religious moderation in

¹ Pribadyo Prakosa, "Moderasi Beragama: Praksis Kerukunan Antar Umat Beragama," *Jurnal Ilmiah Religiosity Entity Humanity (JIREH)* 4, no. 1 (2022): 45–55, <https://doi.org/10.37364/jireh.v4i1.69>.

² Siti Aisyah, "Moderasi Beragama Dalam Pandangan Al-Qur'an," *Journal of Islamic Law El Madani* 2, no. 1 (2023): 28–35, <https://journal.marwah-madani-riau.id/index.php/JILE/article/view/66>.

Indonesia began to be mainstreamed in the policy realm in the early 2000s, along with increasing social challenges related to religious plurality. The Indonesian government officially promotes religious moderation as one of the efforts to reduce radicalism and intolerance. In the 2020-2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN), strengthening religious moderation is one of the priorities to maintain harmony between religious communities in Indonesia. This regulation translates into various programs, such as training of religious teachers, religious extension workers, and public campaigns that emphasize the importance of tolerance, dialogue, and respect for differences.

However, in the midst of an intense campaign of religious moderation, globalization and advances in information technology that expand access to various interpretations of religion have caused confusion including for individuals who are in a sensitive phase of religious development. In this context, it is important to pay attention to the dynamics experienced by individuals in the stage of religious development, especially during puberty which is often characterized by intense emotional, cognitive, and social turmoil. Religious puberty, as a person's initial phase in exploring spiritual beliefs independently, is often filled with a black-and-white view of religious teachings. During this period, individuals tend to seek certainty and absolute truth, which can make them vulnerable to extreme or dogmatic beliefs.³

Based on the above, scholars have shown that individuals who experience the dynamics of religious development are influenced by various psychological and sociocultural factors. In this case, religious development is described in various stages that are in line with the cognitive and moral development of the individual. Studies show that the development of a person's faith is in line with his ability to think. The more mature the ability to think and recognize oneself and others, the more spiritual maturity develops.⁴ Marcia Hermansen added that in the Islamic tradition, religious development also involves the concept of responsibility and thinking skills that increase with age, with a focus on moral and spiritual teaching from an early age.⁵ Marcia Hermansen's findings are also strengthened by other studies that look at adolescent religious development as a search for meaning related to the development of abstract thinking capacity.⁶ In the context of children, Ratna Wati explained that

³ Wifa Lutfiani Tsani, "Pubertas Agama Di Kalangan Remaja," *Kementerian Agama Kab. Pangandaran* (Pangandaran), July 13, 2022, <https://pangandaran.kemenag.go.id/pubertas-agama-dikalangan-remaja/>.

⁴ Heinz Streib, "Conceptualizing and Measuring Religious Development in Terms of Religious Styles and Schemata; New Considerations," paper presented at *Psychologie du développement religieux: questions classiques et perspectives contemporaines*, Lausanne, 2010, <https://pub.unibielefeld.de/record/2276876>.

⁵ Marcia Hermansen, "Faith Development and Spiritual Maturation in the Works of Said Nursi," *Spiritual Dimensions of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi's Risale-I Nur*, 2008, 81-101.

⁶ Mehmet Su, "Piaget'in Bilişsel Gelişim Teorisinin Ergenlik Dönemi Dini Gelişim Üzerindeki Etkileri: Elkind'in Yaklaşımı," *Mesned İlahiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi* 13, no. 1 (2022): 63-82, <https://doi.org/10.51605/mesned.1078189>.

children's religious development is influenced by physical, psychological, and social aspects, as well as influenced by external factors such as family and social environment.⁷

In line with the religious development of the above individuals, scholars have also identified that religious moderation is an important aspect in dealing with complex religious dynamics and social plurality. The development of religious moderation is understood as a process involving cognitive, contive, and psychomotor aspects, which can be measured through tolerant behavior toward other religions, national commitments, and non-violent actions and accommodation to local cultures⁸. Religious moderation is also identified in education, especially in religious teaching which aims to instill an understanding of moderation through religious literacy activities, especially at the primary and secondary levels, in order to prevent extremism and radicalism.⁹ Other research shows that moderation can be strengthened through learning activities that emphasize the importance of religious tolerance, such as those implemented at UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, where the values of moderation are taught through media and interactive discussions.¹⁰

Based on a review of the literature, this study has a different focus from previous research that places more emphasis on the development of individuals in general, particularly in the context of Fowler's theory of faith development and Piaget's cognitive approach. The researcher also takes a different theoretical framework, in which this study uses Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development to analyze the urgency of the transformation. While previous studies still use analytical theories such as the theory of faith development or Piaget's cognitive theory, this study will link the moral stages of adolescents to religious development, which is a new focus of research. Thus, using Kohlberg's theory of moral development will provide additional perspective in understanding how adolescents can move from strong religious ideals to more mature religious moderation, an aspect that has not been specifically raised in previous studies.

This research is expected to make significant scientific contributions in the field of religious psychology and religious education, especially related to the understanding of the transformation from religious puberty to religious moderation. By linking the theory of moral development according to Lawrence Kohlberg's theory, this study not only expands the discourse on how moral stages affect religious

⁷ Ratna Wati, "Memahami Perkembangan Jiwa Keagamaan Pada Anak Dan Remaja," *FOKUS Jurnal Kajian Keislaman Dan Kemasyarakatan* 1, no. 1 (2016): 19-32, <https://doi.org/10.29240/jf.v1i1.58>.

⁸ M. Nur Ghufron and Adri Efferi, "Development of Religious Moderation Measurements," *Jurnal Penelitian* 17, no. 1 (2023): 81-104, <https://doi.org/10.21043/jp.v17i1.22360>.

⁹ Siti Rofiah and Jasminto Jasminto, "The Development Of Assesment Instrument For Religious Moderation Literacy In Madrasah Ibtidaiyah," *AL-WIJDĀN Journal of Islamic Education Studies* 8, no. 1 (2023): 30-40, <https://ejournal.uniramalang.ac.id/index.php/alwijdan/article/view/1922>.

¹⁰ Mahsusi Mahsusi et al., "Identifying Values of Religious Moderation Through Learning Activities," *Al-Qalam* 29, no. 1 (2023): 61-70, <https://doi.org/10.31969/alq.v29i1.1205>.

development, but also offers a new perspective on the urgency of religious moderation as a solution to the religious idealism that often arises during religious puberty. In addition, this research also makes a practical contribution in developing more effective religious education strategies, which can help individuals, especially adolescents, in overcoming the challenges of religious puberty and forming a more balanced and moderate understanding of religion.

The research method used in this study is a qualitative research method with a descriptive-analytical nature of research. The selection of the research method aims to explore in depth the phenomenon of religious puberty and transformation towards religious moderation. This research relies on primary and secondary data sources, such as relevant journals, books, and government reports, as well as empirical data from related previous research. Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development is used as a framework for analysis to understand how adolescents can move from the stage of conventional morality to the stage of postconventional morality, which is characterized by an attitude of religious moderation. The results of this analysis provide an understanding and strengthen how moderate religious education can prevent radicalism and form a more balanced understanding of religion in a multicultural society.

Results and Discussion

Religious Puberty: Identifying Spiritual Emergence and Dynamics

Religious puberty refers to a phase in the life of an individual or group characterized by a very intense spiritual awakening, similar to the psychological symptoms of puberty in human development.¹¹ This concept has become relevant in the midst of modernization, globalization, and technological advances that are increasingly accelerating cross-cultural and religious interactions.¹² Simply put, the term "religious puberty" is used to describe a phenomenon in which a person experiences a profound change in his or her religious orientation, both individually and socially, often accompanied by a desire to be more active in his or her religious life. This phenomenon can be identified in a variety of contexts, including among adolescents who rediscover religion after periods of neglect, among young adults inspired by certain life experiences, or even in social and religious movements that mark a mass spiritual awakening.¹³

One of the factors that influence the emergence of religious puberty is the social environment. This can be identified through daily life experiences, such as interactions with family, peers, communities, and the wider community, can shape an individual's

¹¹ Chaerunnisa, *Puber Beragama Di Negeriku* (Jakarta: Gramedia, 2021), 1–201.

¹² Wichian Sanmee, "Cultural Identity and Globalization: Navigating Tradition and Modernity in Southeast Asia," *Journal of Exploration in Interdisciplinary Methodologies (JEIM)* 1, no. 1 (2024): 11–21, <https://so19.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/JEIM/article/view/605>.

¹³ "What Is A Spiritual Awakening?," *A Soulful Rebellion*, September 2, 2019, Spiritual Awakening Edition, <https://asoulfulrebellion.com/blog/what-is-a-spiritual-awakening>.

perception of religion and spirituality¹⁴. In adolescence, for example, peer pressure and the urge to find self-identity often trigger a renewed interest in religion¹⁵. Adolescence is a time of searching for meaning in life, purpose, or even answers to existential questions, which ultimately leads them to spiritual quests¹⁶.

On the other hand, the media, especially social media, also plays a significant role in shaping the narrative of religious puberty. Social media facilitates the spread of religious ideas very quickly and on a global scale¹⁷. Various media platforms have made it easier to access religious figures, lectures, religious discussions, and virtual communities that discuss religious issues intensively¹⁸. This phenomenon becomes even more evident when religious content becomes a trend among the younger generation, which is often viral. The spread of religious information through social media often triggers a wave of spiritual awakening in many individuals who were previously not very active in their religious lives.¹⁹

The emergence of religious puberty is often closely related to the identity crisis experienced by individuals in modern life²⁰. In the midst of confusion between traditional norms and the challenges of modernity, many people seek the stability and meaning that is often found in religion²¹. In these cases, individuals may feel lost or lose their way of life due to unsettling economic, social, or even political pressures. In such situations, religion often offers definitive answers to fundamental questions about life's purpose, morality, and human relationship with the spiritual world²². This search for identity can also be seen in the context of globalization and modernization that

¹⁴ Bella Lee Contreras Giardiello, *Exploring the Evolution of Religious Beliefs and Experiences: A Developmental Perspective from Adolescence to Adulthood*, 2024, <https://poetcommons.whittier.edu/scholars/54/>.

¹⁵ Ida Nurlita Flni, "Pengaruh Interaksi Sosial Teman Sebaya Di Sekolah Terhadap Motivasi Belajar Siswa Pada Mata Pelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam Di Smp Negeri 2 Jati Agung Lampung Selatan" (Tesis, UIN Raden Intan Lampung, 2024), <http://repository.radenintan.ac.id/34835/>.

¹⁶ Nicolò M. Iannello et al., "How Do Religiosity and Spirituality Associate with Health-Related Outcomes of Adolescents with Chronic Illnesses? A Scoping Review," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 19, no. 20 (2022): 13172, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph192013172>.

¹⁷ Talib Hussain and Dake Wang, "Social Media and the Spiritual Journey: The Place of Digital Technology in Enriching the Experience," *Religions* 15, no. 5 (2024): 616, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15050616>.

¹⁸ Audelynn Jonelle Wong et al., "Digitalisasi, Media Sosial, Dan Dampaknya Pada Keagamaan," *Bandung Bergerak* (Bandung), January 14, 2024, <https://bandungbergerak.id/article/detail/159362/digitalisasi-media-sosial-dan-dampaknya-pada-keagamaan>.

¹⁹ Adi Fadli, "Transformasi Digital Dan Moderasi Beragama: Memperkuat Ummatan Wasathan Di Indonesia," *Schemata: Jurnal Pasca Sarjana IAIN Mataram* 12, no. 1 (2023): 1-14, <https://journal.uinmataram.ac.id/index.php/schemata/article/view/7773>.

²⁰ Wifa Lutfiani Tsani, "Pubertas Agama Di Kalangan Remaja."

²¹ Francesco Molteni, *A Need for Religion: Insecurity and Religiosity in the Contemporary World* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 135:1-220.

²² Muhammad Adip Fanani, "Dialectics and the Relationship between Philosophy and Religion in an Islamic Perspective," *MAQOLAT: Journal of Islamic Studies* 2, no. 1 (2024): 21-32, <https://doi.org/10.58355/maqolat.v2i1.55>.

create pressure for individuals to adapt to rapid changes in society. Young people, especially those living in busy and competitive urban environments, feel alienated from religious traditions and values that they may not have previously cared about. Therefore, they often seek guidance from religion as a way to find a sense of security and stability in the midst of a constant stream of change.²³

In addition to being a means of finding identity and existential answers, religious puberty also often functions as a form of social protest²⁴. In this case, religion is used as a symbol of resistance to modern values that are considered to undermine the traditional social and moral order. For example, there is a tendency for young individuals to adopt more radical forms of religion as a form of rejection of the dominant liberal or secular lifestyle²⁵. This phenomenon can be seen in the rise of conservative religious movements among groups or individuals who are trying to find an identity that is different from what the global cultural mainstream offers²⁶.

Religious education plays a key role in encouraging or accelerating the emergence of religious puberty. Formal and non-formal religious education can awaken religious awareness that did not exist before. Activities such as recitation or even religious studies on social media, often trigger spiritual awakening in individuals. Religious education not only offers knowledge about religious teachings, but also shapes one's frame of mind and perspective on the world. At the same time, religious education that is unbalanced and overemphasizes dogmatic aspects without providing space for critical discussion, can give rise to fanatical or even radical religious fervor²⁷. Religious puberty, in this context, can be fertile ground for the growth of narrow thinking that rejects pluralism or diversity of views.

Nevertheless, religious puberty has a complex impact on the social and religious life of individuals and groups. Based on the mapping that has been carried out. On the one hand, the spiritual awakening experienced during the religious puberty phase can have positive impacts, such as strengthening religious beliefs, strengthening relationships with communities, and increasing participation in religious activities. On the other hand, there is a risk that this phase can also give rise to internal conflicts, especially if individuals are unable to balance religious fervor and the challenges of

²³ Khadijah Khadijah, "Urban Sufism: Membangun Kecerdasan Spiritual Masyarakat Perkotaan Era Modern," *Medina-Te: Jurnal Studi Islam* 19, no. 1 (2023): 32-43, <https://doi.org/10.19109/medinate.v19i1.16998>.

²⁴ Afrida Arinal Muna, "Ekspresi Keberagamaan Selebriti Hijrah: Sebuah Bentuk 'Accomodating Protest' Dan Ekonomi-Politik Dari 'Public Piety,'" *Jurnal Kajian Islam Interdisipliner* 5, no. 1 (2020): 1-16, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jkii.v5i1.1134>.

²⁵ Haldun Gülalp, "Secularism as a Project of Free and Equal Citizenship: Reflections on the Turkish Case," *Frontiers in Sociology* 7 (2022): 902734, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2022.902734>.

²⁶ Azyumardi Azra, "Konservatisme Agama Di Indonesia: Fenomena Religio-Sosial, Kultural, Dan Politik (1)," *UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta (Jakarta)*, November 19, 2020, <https://www.uinjkt.ac.id/id/konservatisme-agama-di-indonesia-fenomena-religio-sosial-kultural-dan-politik-1/>.

²⁷ Rohani Shidiq, "Urgensi Deradikalisasi Dalam Pendidikan Islam Di Sekolah," *Edukasia Islamika: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 2, no. 1 (2017): 1-31, <https://doi.org/10.28918/jei.v2i1.1627>.

modern life. In a broader context, this phenomenon in researchers also affects social dynamics in society. Religious awakening among young individuals is often accompanied by increased awareness of social issues related to religion, such as social justice, business ethics, or politics. Religion-based social movements emerge as a form of response to injustices felt by certain groups. However, if not managed properly, this resurgence can also be a source of social tension, especially in religiously and culturally diverse societies.

Therefore, the emergence of religious puberty is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon that reflects the spiritual, social, and psychological dynamics of individuals and groups in modern society. A variety of factors, including the social environment, the media, identity crises, and religious education, contribute to this religious awakening. Although religious puberty often has a positive impact on strengthening beliefs and increasing religious participation, it also carries risks, especially if it is not balanced with moderate religious education and openness to dialogue. Ultimately, religious puberty is an important part of an individual's spiritual journey that can shape their religious identity in the future.

From Religious Puberty to Religious Moderation

Religious puberty is a critical phase in a person's spiritual development, especially at a young age when individuals begin to explore and shape their religious identity²⁸. Research data show that there has been an increase in interest in religion during puberty, but in this increase, some of them are vulnerable to extreme textual interpretations. This phase is often characterized by a feeling of high enthusiasm in practicing religious teachings, but also prone to extreme or textual understanding in the absence of a deep contextual understanding²⁹. Departing from this explanation, the urgency to campaign for the transformation from religious puberty to religious moderation emerges, where without proper guidance, individuals who are in this phase can be trapped in rigid religious interpretations and tend to be intolerant of differences.

The phase of religious puberty has a distinctive characteristic, namely an intense search for religious identity, often accompanied by strong emotions³⁰. Research data noted that an individual, especially adolescents in Indonesia, identifies with one particular religious interpretation during puberty. At this point, many adolescents try to find meaning in their religious teachings in a literal and sometimes extreme way. In this case, too, individuals tend to identify themselves fully with one particular

²⁸ Chaerunnisa, *Puber Beragama Di Negeriku*, 1-201.

²⁹ Jean M. Twenge et al., "Generational and Time Period Differences in American Adolescents' Religious Orientation, 1966-2014," *PLOS ONE* 10, no. 5 (May 2015): e0121454, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0121454>; Richard F. Davis III and Lisa Kiang, "Religious Identity, Religious Participation, and Psychological Well-Being in Asian American Adolescents," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 45, no. 3 (March 2016): 532-46, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-015-0350-9>.

³⁰ Wifa Lutfiani Tsani, "Pubertas Agama Di Kalangan Remaja."

interpretation and consider that view to be the only truth. In this process, they have difficulty accepting the existence of other interpretations or even tend to condemn different views ³¹. Therefore, it is important to encourage this transformation from religious puberty to religious moderation, where individuals especially adolescents are taught to understand religion more broadly, thoughtfully, and contextually.

This transformation is urgent because religious puberty can be a vulnerable time to radicalism. Data show that the adolescent generation has a high potential to be exposed to extreme ideologies during puberty, showing a tendency to get involved in radical groups ³². In situations where religious fervor is not balanced with adequate knowledge and understanding, adolescents tend to be easily influenced by extreme ideologies ³³. Without a true understanding of the deep teachings of religion, they may get caught up in movements that promise “piety” but essentially form an exclusive and radical mindset ³⁴. Therefore, religious moderation is needed as an effort to build a balanced understanding of religion, which prioritizes tolerance and respect for differences, while maintaining the essence of religious teachings ³⁵.

Psychologically, religious puberty is a time full of existential anxiety, in which adolescents seek answers to profound questions about the meaning of life, purpose, and self-identity. Based on research, adolescents who are in the phase of spiritual search experience high existential anxiety, which if not managed properly, which in turn can lead to extreme understanding. Without proper guidance, this phase can lead to confusion. Therefore, guidance that leads them towards a moderate understanding of religion is important to prevent the extremist tendencies that may arise ³⁶. This transformation must be carried out with an empathetic and educational approach, where adolescents are invited to discuss and engage in a critical but constructive religious dialogue.

On the other hand, religious puberty is a transitional phase in which individuals tend to have excessive enthusiasm in carrying out religious teachings. Data reveal that adolescents who experience this phase without moderate direction are twice as likely

³¹ Karwadi Karwadi, “Deradikalisasi Pemahaman Ajaran Islam,” *Al-Tahrir: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 14, no. 1 (2014): 139–56, <https://doi.org/10.21154/al-tahrir.v14i1.71>.

³² Dilawar Khan and Najeeba Syed, “Radicalization and Prevention: A Case Study of Youth in Quetta,” *Journal of Global Peace and Security Studies (JGPSS)* 5, no. 1 (2024): 10–34, <https://www.pakistanreview.com/index.php/JGPSS/article/view/304>.

³³ Najahan Musyafak and Lulu Choirun Nisa, *Resiliensi Masyarakat Melawan Radikalisme; Aksi Damai Dalam Konflik Agama* (Semarang: Penerbit Lawwana, 2020), 1–189.

³⁴ M. Amin Abdullah, *Dinamika Islam Kultural* (Yogyakarta: IRCiSoD, 2020), 1–324.

³⁵ Arif Sugitanata and Lusia Nia Kurnianti, “FIKIH MODERASI BERAGAMA PERSPEKTIF YUDIAN WAHYUDI,” *At-Ta’awun: Jurnal Mu’amalah Dan Hukum Islam* 2, no. 2 (2023): 143–64, <https://doi.org/10.59579/atw.v2i2.5958>.

³⁶ Elma Haryani, “Pendidikan Moderasi Beragama Untuk Generasi Milenia: Studi Kasus “Lone Wolf” Pada Anak Di Medan,” *Edukasi* 18, no. 2 (2020): 145–58, <https://www.academia.edu/download/102986470/pdf.pdf>.

to join extremist movements³⁷. In this case, individuals including adolescents who are in the phase of religious puberty often feel that they have discovered the absolute truth, so they find it difficult to accept other views that may differ from the teachings they hold³⁸. This is where the urgency of the transformation towards religious moderation lies. Religious moderation provides space for a broader and reflective understanding,³⁹ Where adolescents are invited to not only understand religious teachings from a literal side, but also from an essential perspective that prioritizes universal values such as humanity, justice, and compassion.

This transformation is also important because religious puberty is often closely related to the search for meaning and self-identity. A Madarsan Education Staff of the Ministry of Religion of Pangandaran Regency revealed in an article on the website of the Ministry of Religion of Pangandaran Regency that adolescents who are in the phase of religious puberty consider that the serious application of religious teachings is the key to finding self-identity⁴⁰. Adolescents who are in this phase may feel that they must practice religion in a serious way in order to meet the demands of their religious identity. However, if not well directed, they can be trapped in a rigid mindset, where religious teachings are perceived as a set of rules that must be followed literally without understanding the larger social, historical, and spiritual context. Religious moderation teaches adolescents that religion is not just a rule, but also a moral instruction that is flexible and able to adapt to the complex dynamics of life. Research data also show that a moderate approach to religion can reduce the risk of mental disorders due to a religious identity crisis⁴¹.

Therefore, this transformation must be encouraged through religious education that emphasizes the importance of contextual understanding and critical reflection. The results of the study have revealed that religious teaching based on critical reflection and interactive dialogue has succeeded in improving adolescents' analytical thinking skills. In religious education, it is important for educators to provide space for adolescents to ask questions and reflect on various teachings. This attitude will encourage a deeper and more mature spiritual development, in which adolescents do

³⁷ Anna Naterstad Harpviken, "Psychological Vulnerabilities and Extremism Among Western Youth: A Literature Review," *Adolescent Research Review* 5, no. 1 (March 2020): 1-26, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40894-019-00108-y>.

³⁸ Imam Suprayogo, "Menganggap Sempurna Diri Sendiri Orang Lain Dinilai Sesat," *UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang* (Malang), February 10, 2016, <https://uin-malang.ac.id/r/160201/menganggap-sempurna-diri-sendiri-orang-lain-dinilai-sesat.html>.

³⁹ Agus Akhmadi, "Moderasi Beragama Dalam Keragaman Indonesia," *Inovasi-Jurnal Diklat Keagamaan* 13, no. 2 (2019): 45-55, <https://bdksurabaya.e-journal.id/bdksurabaya/article/download/82/45>.

⁴⁰ Wifa Lutfiani Tsani, "Pubertas Agama Di Kalangan Remaja."

⁴¹ Akilah Mahmud, "Krisis Identitas Di Kalangan Generasi Z Dalam Perspektif Patologi Sosial Pada Era Media Sosial," *Jurnal Ushuluddin: Media Dialog Pemikiran Islam* 26, no. 2 (August 2024): 279-311, <https://doi.org/10.24252/jumdpi.v26i2.51032>.

not simply practice religious teachings because of social pressure or fear, but because they truly understand the underlying values⁴². Moderate religious education not only prevents radicalization, but also creates individuals who are more tolerant, inclusive, and able to contribute positively to society⁴³.

Thus, religious puberty is an important phase in a person's religious development. It is a time when religious fervor is high, but it is also susceptible to misunderstanding or extremes. Therefore, the urgency of the transformation towards religious moderation cannot be ignored. This transformation will help adolescents go through the periods of their search for religious identity in a more mature, balanced, and thoughtful way, so that they can become individuals who are able to hold fast to their beliefs without losing respect for the differences and diversity around them.

Lawrence Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development Analysis of the Transformation of Religious Puberty to Religious Moderation

Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development divides a person's moral development into three main levels: pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional. Each of these levels reflects the individual's stages of thinking in understanding morality, ranging from adherence to external rules to the development of more reflective and autonomous moral principles. This theory works gradually, where a person develops from viewing morality as a way to avoid punishment (pre-conventional), to an awareness of the importance of social rules to maintain (conventional) order, to finally moving to a post-conventional level where more universal moral values, such as justice and humanity, are the main considerations. For example, data from the World Values Survey shows that adolescents in various countries, including Indonesia, generally start with moral attitudes that depend on adherence to social norms and religious rules before developing into more critical and autonomous thinking in the later stages.

In the context of the religious puberty phase, individuals, especially adolescents, who are in the stage of intense religious identity search, are often accompanied by strong emotions.⁴⁴ In the early stages of moral development, called the pre-conventional level, individuals usually view religious teachings as a set of rules that must be followed in order to avoid punishment or gain reward. They tend to take religious teachings literally because they have not been able to grasp the deeper meaning of the

⁴² Rahma Khoirunnissa and Syahidin Syahidin, "Urgensi Pendidikan Moderasi Beragama Sebagai Upaya Menangkal Radikalisme Di Kalangan Mahasiswa," *Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Islam* 10, no. 2 (2023): 177, <https://doi.org/10.36667/jppi.v10i2.1276>.

⁴³ Fahmi Khumaini, Hamam Burhanuddin, and Rz Ricky Satria Wiranata, "Pendidikan Moderasi Beragama: Integrasi Epistemologi Keislaman Dalam Menyikapi Pluralitas Agama Di Indonesia," *SALIHA: Jurnal Pendidikan & Agama Islam* 6, no. 2 (2023): 318–35, <https://doi.org/10.54396/saliha.v6i2.878>.

⁴⁴ Wifa Lutfiani Tsani, "Pubertas Agama Di Kalangan Remaja."

teachings⁴⁵. Data from the Pew Research Center show that in this early phase, adolescents tend to practice religious teachings because of parental or environmental influences, and focus on punishment or reward rather than on critical reflection on those teachings. In this phase, adolescents follow rules because they feel they have to, not because they have understood the moral values underlying those rules⁴⁶.

As an individual's morality develops, especially adolescents usually enter the conventional level, where they begin to see religious teachings as part of social norms that must be respected. At this stage, individuals begin to identify fully with one particular religious interpretation and tend to consider that view as the only truth⁴⁷. This becomes in keeping with the hallmark of conventional morality, in which external rules and norms are accepted without question because they are considered a way to gain social acceptance and maintain order. This is where rigid attitudes often arise towards different interpretations of religion, in which individuals feel that their views are the most correct and that piety is measured by strict adherence to literal rules. Research shows that the religious diversity of adolescents in Indonesia shows that they still hold firmly to the literal interpretation of religious teachings taught by their families or schools without further questioning the meaning behind the teachings⁴⁸. Therefore, the failure to consider the context or differences of view is one of the dominant features of this conventional phase.

The phase of religious puberty is also a period that is vulnerable to radicalism, especially when adolescence is still in the conventional stage. At this stage, individuals often do not have a deep understanding of religious teachings, making it easier to get caught up in extreme movements that promise "piety" through full obedience to literal religious rules⁴⁹. According to research conducted by the Institute for Islamic and Peace Studies (LaKIP) in 2010, it was found that 50% of students in some regions of

⁴⁵ Sulkhan Chakim, "The Youth and the Internet: The Construction of Doctrine, Islam in Practice, and Political Identity in Indonesia," *Journal of Social Studies Education Research* 13, no. 1 (2022): 217-36, <https://www.learntechlib.org/p/222872/>; Ben K. C. Laksana and Bronwyn E. Wood, "Navigating Religious Diversity: Exploring Young People's Lived Religious Citizenship in Indonesia," *Journal of Youth Studies* 22, no. 6 (July 2019): 807-23, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2018.1545998>; Doran C. French, Urip Purwono, and Airin Triwahyuni, "Friendship and the Religiosity of Indonesian Muslim Adolescents," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 40, no. 12 (December 2011): 1623-33, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-011-9645-7>.

⁴⁶ Jeff Diamant and Elizabeth Podrebarac Sciupac, "10 Key Findings about the Religious Lives of U.S. Teens and Their Parents," *Pew Research Center*, September 10, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/09/10/10-key-findings-about-the-religious-lives-of-u-s-teens-and-their-parents/>.

⁴⁷ Karwadi, "Deradikalisasi Pemahaman Ajaran Islam."

⁴⁸ Lyn Parker, "Teaching Religious Tolerance," *Inside Indonesia*, Oktober 2010, <https://www.insideindonesia.org/editions/edition-1025/teaching-religious-tolerance>; Hilary Dauer, "Indonesian Islamic Boarding Schools: The Role of the Pesantren in Preventing the Spread of Islamic Extremism," *Yale Journal of International Affairs*, Mei 2013, <https://www.yalejournal.org/publications/indonesian-islamic-boarding-schools-the-role-of-the-pesantren-in-preventing-the-spread-of-islamic-extremism>.

⁴⁹ Abdullah, *Dinamika Islam Kultural*, 1-324.

Indonesia approve of acts of violence that are considered to be defense of religion. This study reveals that many adolescents, especially in school environments, tend to be influenced by radical ideologies because they seek certainty through strict and rigid rules. In addition, these findings suggest that adolescents who are in the phase of searching for identity are more vulnerable to the invitation to radical movements, especially as they seek to find certainty through rigid and literal interpretations of religion⁵⁰. Kohlberg emphasizes that individuals who fail to transcend these conventional levels are often trapped in a morality based on adherence to rules without critical reflection⁵¹. Extremist movements offer shortcuts to achieving apparent piety, but they essentially reinforce an exclusive and radical mindset, in which the values of humanity and justice are often ignored⁵².

To help adolescents progress further toward the postconventional level, religious education must encourage critical reflection and contextual understanding. At the postconventional level, individuals begin to consider broader moral principles such as justice, humanity, and tolerance, going beyond blind obedience to literal rules. Research data show that education based on critical dialogue and contextual understanding increases tolerance and cross-cultural understanding among adolescents, where they begin to understand the underlying moral reasons⁵³. Education that emphasizes the importance of reflection and dialogue will help individuals, especially adolescents, understand that religious teachings must be applied in a broader context, so that they are no longer trapped in dogmatic or extreme mindsets⁵⁴.

Psychologically, the phase of religious puberty is often accompanied by existential anxiety⁵⁵. Research shows that adolescents who are in search of spiritual identity experience high existential anxiety, often accompanied by confusion about the meaning of life. Adolescents at this conventional stage seek answers to profound questions about their identity, meaning in life, and spiritual purpose. Because they are

⁵⁰ Ahmad Fuad Fanani, "Rising Religious Radicalism in Indonesia: Roots and Shoots," *New Mandala*, November 17, 2021, <https://www.newmandala.org/rising-religious-radicalism-in-indonesia-roots-and-shoots/>; Arzia Tivany Wargadiredja, "Lampu Kuning Meningkatnya Radikalisme Di Sekolah-Sekolah Indonesia," *Setara Institute* (Jakarta), n.d., <https://setara-institute.org/lampu-kuning-meningkatnya-radikalisme-di-sekolah-sekolah-indonesia/>.

⁵¹ Lawrence Kohlberg, *The Philosophy of Moral Development: Moral Stages and the Idea of Justice* (New York City: San Francisco : Harper & Row, 1981).

⁵² Abdullah, *Dinamika Islam Kultural*, 1-324.

⁵³ Eddy Saputra and Ifham Choli, "Toleransi Bergama Dengan Pendekatan Project Based Learning Pada Mata Kuliah Pendidikan Agama Islam Di Perguruan Tinggi Umum," *Edukasi Islami: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 12, no. 001 (2023): 603-20, <https://doi.org/10.30868/ei.v12i001.4805>.

⁵⁴ Zainuddin, "Remaja Dan Kecenderungan Religiusitas," *UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang* (Malang), November 8, 2013, <https://uin-malang.ac.id/blog/post/read/131101/remaja-dan-kecenderungan-religiusitas.html#wrapper>.

⁵⁵ Steven L. Berman, Carl F. Weems, and Timothy R. Stickle, "Existential Anxiety in Adolescents: Prevalence, Structure, Association with Psychological Symptoms and Identity Development," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 35, no. 3 (June 2006): 285-92, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-006-9032-y>.

still in the conventional stage, they tend to seek reassurance through strict adherence to religious teachings. However, this anxiety can exacerbate their tendency to get caught up in rigid and literal views in the absence of proper guidance. With appropriate support, individuals especially adolescents can be directed to skip this conventional stage and reach the postconventional stage, where they begin to develop a more flexible, reflective, and contextual understanding of morality⁵⁶.

In this phase, excessive enthusiasm in practicing religious teachings is also often seen. Individuals, especially teenagers, feel that they must practice religion seriously and literally to prove their piety. According to Kohlberg, this enthusiasm is an indication that they are still at a conventional stage, where external rules greatly affect their moral understanding⁵⁷. If they are not directed to think more reflectively, this attitude can lead to conflicts, both with the social environment and with themselves.

To achieve a more mature moral transformation, it is important for families, educators, and religious communities to play an active role⁵⁸. In Kohlberg's theory, the moral development of individuals can be influenced by interactions with the social environment that support critical dialogue⁵⁹. Studies have found that adolescents who grow up in family and educational environments that are open to critical dialogue are more likely to reach postconventional levels in their moral understanding⁶⁰. Families that are open to reflective discussion will help adolescents develop a more flexible and reflective understanding of morality, while an authoritarian environment reinforces their tendency to survive on conventional stages. Educators and religious communities should also provide guidance that encourages adolescents to understand religious teachings in a broader context, so that they can see that religion is a relevant moral guide in modern life⁶¹.

The transformation towards religious moderation is ultimately closely linked to the search for meaning and self-identity that is at the heart of the religious puberty phase. Individuals, especially adolescents, often feel that they must take religion

⁵⁶ Haryani, "Pendidikan Moderasi Beragama Untuk Generasi Milenia: Studi Kasus "Lone Wolf" Pada Anak Di Medan."

⁵⁷ Kohlberg, *The Philosophy of Moral Development: Moral Stages and the Idea of Justice*.

⁵⁸ Badrun Hasani, "Peran Keluarga Dalam Penguatan Moderasi Beragama Untuk Pemantapan Empat Pilar Kebangsaan," *Kaganga: Jurnal Pendidikan Sejarah Dan Riset Sosial Humaniora* 6, no. 1 (2023): 260–73, <https://doi.org/10.31539/kaganga.v6i1.5593>; Hafizh Idri Purbajati, "Peran Guru Dalam Membangun Moderasi Beragama Di Sekolah," *FALASIFA: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 11, no. 2 (2020): 182–94, <https://ejournal.uas.ac.id/index.php/falasifa/article/download/569/398>; Muhammad Rizal Firdaus, "Peran Komunitas Arus Informasi Santri Nusantara Dalam Implementasi Moderasi Beragama Di Media Sosial," *Journal of Islamic Management* 3, no. 1 (2023): 48–65, <https://doi.org/10.15642/jim.v3i1.1107>.

⁵⁹ Kohlberg, *The Philosophy of Moral Development: Moral Stages and the Idea of Justice*.

⁶⁰ Arif Sugitanata, "Membumikan Fikih Flexi-Parenting Sebagai Suatu Pendekatan Dalam Pengasuhan Anak Di Era Modern," *At-Ta'awun: Jurnal Mu'amalah Dan Hukum Islam* 3, no. 1 (2024): 20–49, <https://doi.org/10.59579/atw.v3i1.6847>.

⁶¹ Akmal Bashori et al., "Membumikan Moderasi Moral Dalam Menghadapi Erosi Nilai-Nilai Sosial," *Khazanah: Jurnal Studi Islam Dan Humaniora* 22, no. 1 (2024): 74–96.

seriously in order to find their spiritual identity⁶². However, without proper guidance, they can get stuck in a rigid mindset, where religious teachings are understood literally and rigidly⁶³. This is where the importance of directing them to the postconventional level, where they can understand religion as a moral guide that is flexible, contextual, and relevant to more complex lives⁶⁴.

Thus, the implementation of Kohlberg's theory of moral development in the analysis of religious puberty suggests that individuals who are in this phase need appropriate guidance to develop toward a more mature moral understanding. Without support, adolescents can be trapped in rigid literal understandings, which increases the risk of radicalism. The transformation from conventional to postconventional morality becomes essential to create individuals who are more reflective, tolerant, and able to apply religious teachings wisely in the context of plural and dynamic life.

Conclusion

Research shows that religious puberty is a critical phase in a person's religious development. During this time, individuals, especially adolescents, often experience intense spiritual identity searches and risk being trapped in a rigid and extreme understanding of religious teachings. This phenomenon is exacerbated by the influence of the social environment, media, as well as identity crises that young individuals often experience. Lawrence Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development provides a relevant theoretical framework for analyzing the moral development of adolescents in this phase. Kohlberg explains how individuals can move from conventional morality that focuses on adherence to external rules to a postconventional morality that is more reflective and oriented towards universal principles such as justice and humanity.

The limitation of this study lies in the lack of more in-depth empirical data from different age groups and social backgrounds. The study also focuses more on the phases of religious puberty without explicitly including cross-cultural perspectives that may have different dynamics of religious development. In addition, the approach used in this study still relies on concepts taken from Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development, which, while relevant, has not fully accommodated the local nuances and socio-religious context in Indonesia as a whole. Further research of a more quantitative and longitudinal nature may be needed to better understand how the transformation from religious puberty to religious moderation takes place in a variety of social and cultural backgrounds.

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⁶² Wifa Lutfiani Tsani, "Pubertas Agama Di Kalangan Remaja."

⁶³ Abdullah, *Dinamika Islam Kultural*, 1-324.

⁶⁴ Bashori et al., "Membumikan Moderasi Moral Dalam Menghadapi Erosi Nilai-Nilai Sosial."

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