

STRENGTHENING RELIGIOUS MODERATION TO FOSTER A HARMONIOUS SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia's multicultural society is characterized by high religious diversity, which, while serving as social capital, also presents potential risks of conflict due to increasing intolerance and differing interpretations of religious teachings. This community service (PKM) activity addresses the problem of limited public understanding of religious moderation and the lack of educational initiatives promoting tolerance and harmony. The program aims to strengthen religious moderation to create a harmonious society in Sausu Village, Parigi Moutong Regency, Central Sulawesi. A participatory methodology was employed, including observation, interviews, documentation, and outreach through counseling and interactive discussions involving community leaders, youth, and residents. Findings indicate that prior to the intervention, community understanding of moderation was limited and largely focused on ritual aspects. However, after the program, participants demonstrated increased awareness of moderation values such as *tawasuth*, *tasamuh*, *tawazun*, and *i'tidal*, along with improved attitudes toward tolerance and social interaction. The integration of local cultural values such as *gotong royong* enhanced program effectiveness. Despite challenges such as limited time and varying educational backgrounds, the program successfully fostered active tolerance and community empowerment. In conclusion, strengthening religious moderation through community-based educational approaches is effective in promoting social harmony and preventing potential conflicts in pluralistic societies.

Keywords: Religious Moderation, Social Harmony, Tolerance

ABSTRAK

Masyarakat multikultural Indonesia ditandai oleh keragaman agama yang tinggi, yang meskipun berfungsi sebagai modal sosial, juga menghadirkan potensi risiko konflik akibat meningkatnya intoleransi dan perbedaan penafsiran terhadap ajaran agama. Kegiatan Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat (PKM) ini bertujuan untuk mengatasi masalah kurangnya pemahaman masyarakat tentang moderasi agama serta minimnya inisiatif pendidikan yang mendorong toleransi dan kerukunan. Program ini bertujuan untuk memperkuat moderasi agama guna menciptakan masyarakat yang harmonis di Desa Sausu, Kabupaten Parigi Moutong, Sulawesi Tengah. Metodologi partisipatif digunakan, termasuk observasi, wawancara, dokumentasi, serta penjangkauan melalui konseling dan diskusi interaktif yang melibatkan para pemimpin masyarakat, pemuda, dan warga. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa sebelum intervensi,

pemahaman masyarakat tentang moderasi masih terbatas dan sebagian besar berfokus pada aspek ritual. Namun, setelah program tersebut, para peserta menunjukkan peningkatan kesadaran akan nilai-nilai moderasi seperti *tawasuth*, *tasamuh*, *tawazun*, dan *i'tidal*, serta sikap yang lebih baik terhadap toleransi dan interaksi sosial. Integrasi nilai-nilai budaya lokal seperti gotong royong meningkatkan efektivitas program. Meskipun menghadapi tantangan seperti keterbatasan waktu dan latar belakang pendidikan yang beragam, program ini berhasil menumbuhkan toleransi aktif dan pemberdayaan masyarakat. Kesimpulannya, penguatan moderasi agama melalui pendekatan pendidikan berbasis masyarakat efektif dalam mempromosikan kerukunan sosial dan mencegah potensi konflik dalam masyarakat pluralistik.

Kata Kunci: Moderasi Beragama, Kerukunan Sosial, Toleransi

BACKGROUND

Indonesia is known as a multicultural nation with a very high degree of diversity across religious, philosophical, scientific, and linguistic lines. In the process of developing inclusive lifestyles, this ambiguity becomes a crux of social capital. However, this plurality also indicates the presence of good leadership to avoid social decline. Within the context of religion, the Indonesian people live in a relatively tolerant manner, although there are still some groups that exhibit extremism and intolerance. Because of this, diversity must be understood as a social reality that necessitates tolerance, respect, and social integration in order to fight against national interests (Maulani, 2012).

Even though Indonesia is known for having a high level of tolerance, there is a chance that social conflicts based on religion will become an issue. This conflict is typically caused by differing interpretations of religious teachings, increasing intolerance, and politicizing religious identities. Data indicates that cases of intolerance and religious freedom have increased in the last few years, affecting both national and non-national actors. This situation indicates that religious differences can become a source of conflict if they are not handled properly, especially in social and political situations (Syukron, 2017).

The goal of achieving social harmony in a divided society is moderate behaviour. The influence of softness (*wasathiyah*), tolerance, inclusivity, and kindness on difference is discussed in this concept. The implementation of multi-party moderation can, among other things, reduce the potential for conflict, facilitate multi-party dialogue, and eventually quell terrorism. In addition, moderation in general serves to create social stability and achieve national integration through various forms of cooperation and mutual aid (Muhtarom et al., 2020). To be moderate is to have a moderate attitude toward, and behaviour toward, other people; to be moderate means to be moderate, not extreme, and to be able to tolerate differences within the pluralistic society. Moderation is understood to balance commitments to religious teachings with diverse social realities, so that neither radical nor liberal ideologies predominate. As a part of contextual religious practice, this concept also highlights the importance of values like humility, tolerance, and self-control (Fahri & Zainuri, 2019).

From a conceptual standpoint, moderation is not only seen as a passive quality, but also as an active trait in creating harmonious social lives. Diverse modes of moderation uphold the principles of discordance between text and context, between individual rights and social needs, and between personal autonomy and the influence of authority figures on other people's autonomy. Because of this, moderation has become a strategy for countering radicalism and religiously-based social conflict in modern society (Musyrifah, 2024). The most important numbers for moderation are *tawasuth* (path of peace), *tasamuh* (tolerance), *tawazun* (peace), and *i'tidal* (peace). The *tawasuth* teaches that there is no superiority among all things, whereas the *tasamuh* implies a link between measurement and differences in key performance indicators (Huda, 2024). In describing human life, *tawazun* emphasizes the balance of social and spiritual aspects, as well as the importance of practicality and proportion. The second number becomes the primary foundation for developing a moderate and inclusive religious identity.

Moderation in general has a significant role to play in creating harmonious social life among the majority population. Moderating group dynamics can reduce conflict potential and maintain social harmony by fostering tolerance, mutual respect, and dialogue among members of the group. As a key component in promoting individual rights and social stability within the context of religious, cultural, and linguistic diversity in Indonesia, multi-ethnic moderation is essential (Aflahah et al., 2023). The development of an inclusive and democratic society is another goal of moderation. A moderate score encourages people to engage in conversation, value diversity, and reject prejudice in all its forms. In this way, diversity in moderation is not only reflected in intergroup relations, but also in the active and successful development of social capital (Patih et al., 2023).

Various previous studies have demonstrated that the implementation of religious moderation through education and social activities positively impacts the enhancement of societal understanding and tolerance. For instance, classroom action research shows that using the values of *tawasuth*, *tasamuh*, *tawazun*, and *i'tidal* in learning can significantly help students understand religious moderation. This shows that an educational approach is an effective way to instill moderate values early on (Wahid, 2024). The goal of achieving social harmony in a divided society is moderate behaviour. The influence of softness (*wasathiyah*), tolerance, inclusivity, and kindness on difference is discussed in this concept. The implementation of multi-party moderation can, among other things, reduce the potential for conflict, facilitate multi-party dialogue, and eventually quell terrorism. In addition, moderation in general serves to create social stability and achieve national integration through various forms of cooperation and mutual aid (Miftahul, 2024).

The public's understanding of the globalization concept is the primary challenge in addressing the crisis in Indonesia. Moderate behaviour that promotes tolerance, inclusivity, and respect is frequently overlooked in a comprehensive manner, resulting in the majority of the population engaging in extreme and exclusive behaviours. Moderate religious literacy can foster intolerance and foster unity among individuals. This condition indicates that the internalization of the moderation threshold is not complete, necessitating systematic educational initiatives to cultivate the community's awareness of the significance of moderation in communal life (Kurniawan, 2024).

The extent of educational activities that explicitly promote tolerance and social harmony has a significant impact on the general understanding of the population's daily life. Programs of education or community development that prioritize moderation are effective in fostering a sense of respect and unity among the group. However, the project's implementation has not yet been completed in various regions, resulting in a significant number of the population lacking access to comprehensive tolerance education. Therefore, educational reform that is based on moderation is crucial for the development of fanaticism and the maintenance of social cohesion (Sihotang, 2024).

Harmony can be achieved by the society when the modes of moderation are consistently internalized in social life. Social harmony is characterized by the presence of mutual respect, trust, and cooperation among distinct groups. Diversity moderation serves as a tool for fostering social harmony and preventing conflict through the promotion of dialogue, inclusivity, and tolerance regarding diversity. Consequently, the concept of moderation is not solely the responsibility of the individual, but also of the educational institution, government, and society as a whole in the development of a sustainable and harmonious lifestyle (Abdullah & Botma, 2023).

Religious Freedom: Sausu Village in Parigi Moutong Regency is an area that reflects rural life, characterized by a relatively homogeneous social fabric yet remains open to diversity. The community's socio-religious life is dominated by strong religious practices and local wisdom values that uphold solidarity, cooperation, and tolerance. Interactions among residents are harmonious, with religious and social activities involving all segments of society. However, like other regions in Indonesia, Sausu Village is also vulnerable to external influences such as exclusive religious ideologies; therefore, strengthening religious moderation is essential to maintaining the stability and social harmony of the local community.

METHODS FOR IMPLEMENTING COMMUNITY SERVICE (PKM) ACTIVITIES

The observation method was used as an initial step to gain a realistic understanding of the social, cultural, and religious conditions of the community at the service location. Observations are conducted directly in the field by observing community activities, patterns of social interaction, and daily religious practices. Through this method, the service team can identify issues related to the understanding of religious moderation, levels of tolerance, and potential conflicts that may arise. The data from the observations serves as the foundation for designing community service programs that are targeted and aligned with the community's needs.

Interviews were conducted to gather more in-depth information from various stakeholders, such as religious leaders, village officials, youth, and the general public. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach to allow researchers to collect flexible yet focused data. Through this process, an understanding was gained regarding the community's perceptions of religious moderation, their experiences in religious and social life, and the challenges they face in maintaining harmony. The interview results also helped identify local potential that could be developed in community service activities.

The documentation method is used to supplement data obtained through observation and interviews. Documentation involves collecting various supporting documents, such as village profiles, demographic data, information on religious activities, and photographs of community activities. In addition, documentation also includes recording the implementation process of community service activities as evidence of the activities and material for evaluation. This documentation data is important for strengthening the validity of the information and serves as an archive that can be used in the preparation of reports and scientific publications.

Outreach methods are the primary means of educating the public about the importance of religious moderation. Outreach activities take the form of public awareness campaigns, lectures, and interactive discussions involving various segments of society. The material presented covers the concept of religious moderation, the values of tolerance, and the importance of maintaining harmony in social life. This method is designed to be easily understood by the public by using simple language and examples relevant to daily life. Speakers at these events include academics from the State Islamic University Datokarama Palu and religious leaders.



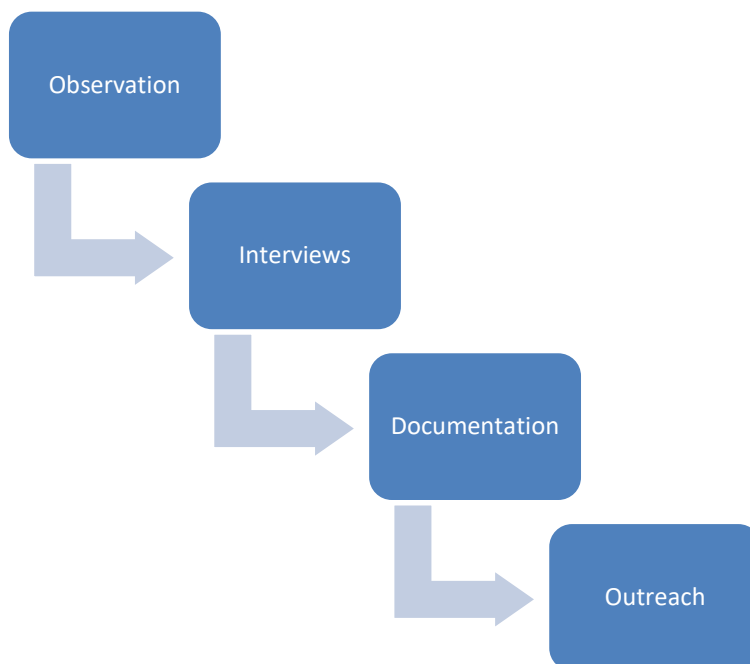


Figure 1. Stage for method

LOCATION AND DATE

An outreach program focused on promoting moderation to foster a harmonious society was held in the village of Sausu, Sausu Subdistrict, Parigi Moutong Regency, Central Sulawesi, on October 1–2, 2024.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The community service program (PKM) entitled “*Strengthening Religious Moderation in Creating a Harmonious Society*” was conducted in Sausu Village, Sausu District, Parigi Moutong Regency, Central Sulawesi, on October 1–2, 2024. This activity was designed as a strategic intervention to address the limited understanding of religious moderation and the need to foster tolerance among diverse community members. Sausu Village represents a typical rural Indonesian community characterized by strong religious adherence, communal values, and local wisdom, yet also vulnerable to external influences that may disrupt social harmony.

Sausu Village, located in Sausu District of Parigi Moutong Regency, Central Sulawesi, reflects a typical rural Indonesian community where religion plays a central role in daily life. The majority of the population adheres to Islam, which significantly influences social norms, cultural practices, and community interactions. Religious activities such as daily prayers, Friday congregational prayers, Qur’anic recitation, and Islamic study circles (*pengajian*) are regularly conducted and widely attended by community members. Mosques and small prayer houses (*musholla*) serve not only as places of worship but also as centers for social gathering and community engagement.

The religious life in Sausu Village is closely intertwined with local traditions and cultural values. Practices such as communal prayers, religious celebrations, and social cooperation during Islamic holidays like Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha demonstrate a strong sense of solidarity and collective identity. The tradition of *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation) is also evident in religious contexts, where community members actively participate in organizing religious events and maintaining

places of worship. This integration of religion and local culture contributes to a relatively harmonious social environment.

In terms of religious understanding, the community generally demonstrates a moderate orientation, emphasizing peaceful coexistence and mutual respect. Religious leaders (*tokoh agama*) and community elders play a significant role in guiding religious practices and maintaining social harmony. Their influence helps to prevent the spread of radical or extreme interpretations of religion. However, like many rural areas, the level of formal religious education varies among individuals, which can affect the depth of understanding regarding broader concepts such as religious moderation and interfaith tolerance.

Despite the overall harmonious condition, there are potential challenges related to religious diversity and external influences. Exposure to information from social media and external religious movements may introduce different interpretations of religious teachings, which could lead to misunderstandings if not properly addressed. In some cases, limited access to structured religious education and dialogue platforms may hinder the community's ability to critically engage with such influences.

Furthermore, interaction among different social groups within the village generally reflects tolerance and respect, although opportunities for structured intergroup dialogue remain limited. The absence of regular educational programs specifically focused on religious moderation and tolerance may result in a passive form of harmony, where differences are accepted but not actively discussed or understood in depth.

Overall, the religious condition in Sausu Village can be characterized as stable and relatively harmonious, supported by strong cultural values, active religious participation, and the influential role of community leaders. However, there is a need to strengthen community understanding of religious moderation through continuous education, dialogue, and empowerment programs. Such efforts are essential to ensure that harmony is not only maintained but also reinforced in the face of evolving social and cultural dynamics.

The implementation involved various stakeholders, including village officials, religious leaders, youth groups, and general community members. The program adopted participatory and educative approaches, ensuring that the community was actively involved in all stages of the activity. The core methods included counseling sessions, group discussions, mentoring, and community empowerment initiatives. These approaches were intended not only to transfer knowledge but also to encourage behavioural transformation aligned with the principles of religious moderation.



Figure 2. socialization of religious moderation

Previous studies emphasize that community-based interventions are effective in promoting religious moderation, especially in rural areas where direct engagement and social interaction remain strong (Fahri & Zainuri, 2019). Therefore, this PKM activity was designed to align with such approaches by integrating local cultural values with modern concepts of moderation.

One of the main findings of this PKM activity is that the initial understanding of religious moderation among the Sausu Village community was relatively limited. Most participants associated religion primarily with ritual practices rather than broader social values such as tolerance, inclusivity, and balance. This indicates a gap between theological understanding and social application of religious teachings.

During the counseling sessions, participants showed increased awareness of the concept of *wasathiyah* (moderation), particularly after being introduced to its core values such as *tawasuth* (middle path), *tasamuh* (tolerance), *tawazun* (balance), and *i'tidal* (justice). Participants began to realize that religious moderation is not about weakening religious commitment but about practicing religion in a way that promotes peace and coexistence.



Figure 3. Participants enthusiastically took part in the activity

This finding is consistent with previous research indicating that low levels of religious literacy often contribute to exclusivist attitudes (Zuhdi & Sarwenda, 2020)). Moreover, the improvement observed after the intervention supports the argument that structured educational programs can significantly enhance understanding of moderation principles.

Another important finding relates to changes in community attitudes toward tolerance. Initially, some participants demonstrated passive tolerance, meaning they accepted differences but did not actively engage with people from different religious or social backgrounds. However, after participating in the PKM activities, there was a noticeable shift toward active tolerance.

Participants began to express willingness to engage in dialogue, participate in joint social activities, and respect differences more openly. This shift indicates that the program successfully encouraged not only cognitive understanding but also affective and behavioural changes.



Figure 4. question and answer session

Research by Banshchikova et al (2015) highlights that tolerance is a multidimensional construct involving attitudes, behaviours, and social interactions. The findings from this PKM activity support this perspective, as participants demonstrated improvements across these dimensions. Furthermore, the role of community leaders in modelling tolerant behaviour was identified as a critical factor in reinforcing these changes.

The success of the PKM program was strongly influenced by the presence of local cultural values and social capital in Sausu Village. The community has a tradition of mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*) and strong kinship ties, which facilitated the acceptance of the program's messages. These local values were integrated into the program by linking religious moderation with existing cultural practices. For example, the concept of *tasamuh* was connected to local traditions of communal gatherings and mutual assistance. This approach made the concept of moderation more relatable and easier to internalize.

According to Putnam (2000), social capital plays a crucial role in fostering cooperation and collective action. In this context, the strong social networks in Sausu Village acted as a catalyst for the dissemination and reinforcement of moderation values. This finding underscores the importance of contextualizing interventions within local cultural frameworks.

The counseling sessions and participatory methods used in this PKM activity proved to be highly effective. Unlike traditional lecture-based approaches, the use of interactive discussions, case studies, and real-life examples allowed participants to actively engage with the material.

Participants reported that they found the sessions more meaningful and easier to understand due to the use of simple language and practical illustrations. Group discussions also provided a platform for sharing experiences and addressing misconceptions.

This finding aligns with adult learning theory, which emphasizes the importance of experiential and participatory learning (Knowles et al., 2014). In addition, previous studies have shown that participatory approaches are more effective in promoting social change than one-way communication methods.

Despite the overall success of the program, several challenges were identified during its implementation. One of the main challenges was the diversity of participants' educational backgrounds, which affected their ability to understand certain concepts. Another challenge was the limited time available for the program, which restricted the depth of discussion and follow-up activities. Additionally, some participants initially showed resistance due to preconceived notions about religious teachings.

These challenges highlight the need for continuous and sustained efforts in promoting religious moderation. Changing attitudes and behaviours related to religion requires long-term engagement and consistent reinforcement. The PKM activity also contributed to community empowerment by encouraging participants to take active roles in promoting moderation within their own social circles. Several participants expressed interest in becoming facilitators or advocates for religious moderation. The formation of informal community groups focused on promoting tolerance was one of the key outcomes of the program. These groups are expected to serve as local agents of change, ensuring the sustainability of the program's impact. Empowerment is a critical component of community development, as it enables individuals to take control of their own social environment. The findings of this PKM activity demonstrate that empowerment can be effectively achieved through education and participatory engagement.

The findings of this PKM activity are consistent with previous studies on religious moderation and community engagement. For instance, Fahri & Zainuri (2019) found that educational interventions significantly improve understanding of moderation concepts. However, this study also contributes new insights by focusing on a rural context in Central Sulawesi, which has been relatively underexplored in previous research. This adds to the growing body of literature on religious moderation in diverse Indonesian settings.

The results of this PKM activity have several important implications for future programs. First, there is a need to expand similar initiatives to other rural areas, particularly those with limited access to educational resources. Second, future programs should incorporate longer-term mentoring and follow-up activities to ensure sustainability. Third, collaboration with local governments and institutions should be strengthened to support broader implementation. Finally, the integration of digital platforms could enhance the reach and impact of such programs, especially among younger generations.

CONCLUSION

The PKM activity in Sausu Village successfully improved community understanding of religious moderation, promoted tolerance, and contributed to social harmony. The use of participatory methods, integration of local cultural values, and focus on community empowerment were key factors in achieving these outcomes. Indonesia's rich diversity presents both opportunities and challenges in maintaining social harmony, particularly in the face of increasing religious intolerance and potential conflict. The concept of religious moderation, grounded in values such as *tawasuth*, *tasamuh*, *tawazun*, and *i'tidal*, emerges as a strategic approach to fostering tolerance, inclusivity, and balance in a pluralistic society. The PKM activity conducted in Sausu Village demonstrates that community-based, participatory, and educational approaches are effective in enhancing public understanding of moderation and transforming attitudes from passive to active tolerance. Supported by strong local cultural values and social capital, the program successfully contributed to strengthening social cohesion, although challenges such as limited literacy and time constraints remain. Therefore, continuous education, community empowerment, and collaborative efforts are essential to sustain and expand the impact of religious moderation in creating a harmonious and resilient society.

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