

## ADOLESCENT MORAL VALUES: A QUALITATIVE STUDY IN MEDAN DENAI DISTRICT

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to understand the role of internalizing religious values in shaping adolescents' moral values, as well as its influence on religious awareness, social behavior, and the quality of interpersonal relationships in the Medan Denai District. The approach used is descriptive-qualitative with purposive sampling techniques targeting adolescents aged 15–18 as the main informants, and parents, teachers, and community leaders as supporting informants. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation, and then analyzed thematically. Research results show that the internalization of religious values plays an important role in shaping the cognitive, emotional, and social aspects of adolescents' moral values. Cognitively, adolescents are able to distinguish between right and wrong behavior and consider the moral consequences before acting. Emotionally, the practice of worship and participation in routine religious activities help adolescents manage stress, calm themselves, and control their emotions. Socially, internalized religious awareness encourages the formation of discipline, responsibility, social care, as well as the strengthening of harmonious interpersonal relationships based on empathy.

**Keywords:** *Interpersonal Relationships; Internalization of Religious Values; Religious Awareness; Adolescent Moral Values; Prosocial Behavior.*

### **Abstrak**

*Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memahami peran internalisasi nilai religius dalam pembentukan nilai moral remaja, serta pengaruhnya terhadap kesadaran beragama, perilaku sosial, dan kualitas hubungan interpersonal di Kecamatan Medan Denai. Pendekatan yang digunakan adalah deskriptif-kualitatif dengan teknik purposive sampling terhadap remaja usia 15–18 tahun sebagai informan utama, serta orang tua, guru, dan tokoh masyarakat sebagai informan pendukung. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis secara tematik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa internalisasi nilai religius berperan penting dalam pembentukan aspek kognitif, emosional, dan sosial nilai moral remaja. Secara kognitif, remaja mampu membedakan perilaku yang benar dan salah serta mempertimbangkan konsekuensi moral sebelum bertindak. Secara emosional, praktik ibadah dan keterlibatan dalam kegiatan keagamaan rutin membantu remaja mengelola stres, menenangkan diri, dan mengendalikan emosi. Secara sosial, kesadaran beragama yang terinternalisasi mendorong terbentuknya sikap disiplin, tanggung jawab, kepedulian sosial, serta penguatan hubungan interpersonal yang harmonis dan berbasis empati.*

**Kata kunci:** *Hubungan Interpersonal; Internalisasi Nilai Religius; Kesadaran Beragama; Nilai Moral Remaja; Perilaku Prosocial.*

## INTRODUCTION

Adolescent development is a crucial phase in the formation of self-identity, including the internalization of moral values that guide thinking, attitudes, and actions. At this stage, adolescents not only undergo biological and psychological changes but also face complex social dynamics due to the influence of family, social environment, education, as well as the development of technology and social media. Moral values play an important role as a foundation in shaping adolescents' character so that they can distinguish between right and wrong behavior, both normatively and socially.

Moral values in adolescents are not formed instantaneously but develop through continuous processes of socialization and internalization. The family serves as the primary agent in instilling moral values from an early age, while schools and the broader community function as reinforcing and guiding institutions in shaping adolescents' moral behavior. In addition, religiosity and local cultural values contribute significantly to the formation of adolescents' moral orientations. The interaction among these factors creates diverse dynamics, indicating that adolescents' moral values cannot be generalized universally but must be understood within their specific social and cultural contexts.

In urban communities such as Medan Denai District, rapid social change presents particular challenges to the moral development of adolescents. The forces of globalization, advances in information technology, and increasingly open social interactions often introduce new values that are not always aligned with local cultural and religious norms. These conditions have the potential to influence adolescents' attitudes and behaviors, including a decline in social concern, an increase in deviant behaviors, and a weakening of responsibility and honesty. Therefore, a deeper understanding of how adolescents perceive and internalize moral values in their daily lives has become an urgent necessity.

Research on adolescents' moral values has received considerable attention in the fields of developmental psychology, education, and sociology. Numerous studies indicate that moral values play a significant role in shaping adolescents'

social behavior, including self-regulation, responsibility, and ethical interaction within their social environments (Santrock, 2018). However, much of the existing literature remains dominated by quantitative approaches that focus on measuring levels of morality or examining the relationship between moral values and specific variables, such as religiosity, self-control, and deviant behavior (Kohlberg, 1984; Nucci, 2016).

Moreover, studies on adolescent morality in Indonesia generally concentrate on problematic issues, such as juvenile delinquency, deviant behavior, and moral degradation (Sarwono, 2019). This problem-oriented approach tends to overlook adolescents' moral strengths, including honesty, empathy, social concern, and responsibility. As a result, the positive moral potential of adolescents and their adaptive strategies in responding to moral challenges within their social environments have not been comprehensively explored.

Based on these research gaps, the novelty of this study lies in several key aspects. First, this study employs a qualitative approach to explore adolescents' moral values from their own subjective perspectives, thereby providing a deeper and more contextualized understanding. Second, this research conceptualizes moral values as a dynamic process by examining how adolescents construct, interpret, and apply moral values through everyday social interactions.

Accordingly, this study is expected to enrich scholarly discourse in the fields of moral education and adolescent developmental psychology, while also offering practical contributions for parents, educators, and policymakers in designing more contextual, humane, and sustainable strategies for adolescent moral development, particularly in the Medan Denai District.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive qualitative research design. This approach was chosen because it aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the meanings, values, and subjective experiences of adolescents related to moral values in their everyday lives. Qualitative research allows

researchers to explore social realities in a holistic and contextual manner, particularly in understanding how adolescents perceive, internalize, and apply moral values within their social environments (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The study was conducted in Medan Denai District, Medan City. The selection of this location was based on its urban and multicultural characteristics, with diverse social, cultural, and economic backgrounds. These conditions make Medan Denai District a relevant context for comprehensively examining the dynamics of adolescents' moral values. The research was carried out over a period adjusted to the needs of data collection and in-depth exploration until data saturation was achieved.

The research subjects were adolescents residing in Medan Denai District, aged between 15 and 18 years. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, a technique that involves the deliberate selection of participants based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives, such as active involvement in social environments, educational background, and the diversity of social and religious experiences. To enrich the data and enhance the validity of the findings, this study also involved supporting informants, including parents, teachers, and community leaders.

Data were collected using several primary techniques, namely in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. In-depth interviews were conducted to explore adolescents' perspectives, experiences, and interpretations of moral values, such as honesty, responsibility, social concern, and respect for others. Participant observation was used to observe adolescents' moral behaviors within the context of daily social interactions in family, school, and community settings. Meanwhile, documentation served as supporting data, including records of adolescents' activities, school archives, and documents related to social and religious activities.

Data analysis in this study was conducted thematically by referring to the interactive analysis model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion

drawing. Data reduction involved selecting and focusing on data relevant to the research objectives. The data were then presented in the form of descriptive narratives and thematic matrices to facilitate meaning-making. The final stage involved drawing and verifying conclusions through an iterative process to ensure the consistency and accuracy of data interpretation.

To ensure data trustworthiness, this study applied triangulation techniques, including source triangulation, method triangulation, and time triangulation. Source triangulation was carried out by comparing data obtained from adolescents, parents, teachers, and community leaders. Method triangulation involved comparing findings from interviews, observations, and documentation. In addition, member checking was conducted by confirming the research findings with the informants to ensure alignment between the collected data and the meanings intended by the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

This study upheld the ethical principles of qualitative research, including informed consent, confidentiality of informants' identities, and respect for the values and norms prevailing in the research setting. All participants were involved voluntarily and were provided with clear explanations regarding the objectives and potential benefits of the study prior to the data collection process.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### ***Internalization of Religious Values in Cognitive and Emotional Development***

The results of the observations indicate that the internalization of religious values plays an important role in shaping the cognitive and emotional aspects of adolescents' moral values in Medan Denai District. From a cognitive perspective, adolescents who are actively involved in religious practices tend to use religious values as guiding principles in their thinking and decision-making processes, particularly in distinguishing between behaviors considered right and wrong. This is reflected in their cautious attitudes toward action, awareness of moral consequences, and a tendency to restrain themselves from behaviors that may lead to deviance.

In the emotional domain, the internalization of religious values appears to

foster positive emotions, such as calmness, a sense of security, and self-control when facing social pressures. Adolescents who regularly perform religious practices and participate in religious activities demonstrate better emotional regulation abilities, including the management of anger and anxiety. In contrast, adolescents who are less consistent in their religious practices tend to exhibit emotional fluctuations and moral confusion in certain situations. The observational findings are also consistent with the interview data, which are presented below.

### ***Interviews with Adolescents***

The interview results reveal that adolescents perceive religious values as a guide for thinking and acting in their daily lives. The informants stated that religious teachings help them consider moral consequences before making decisions.

*“If I want to act now, I first think about whether it's allowed or not according to religion. I'm also afraid of making a mistake, so I am more cautious.”*

From an emotional aspect, the informants stated that religious practices serve as a means to calm themselves when facing social pressure or conflicts with peers.

*“When I feel restless or have a lot on my mind, I pray or do my prayers. After that, I feel calmer and less easily upset.”*

### ***Interview with Parents***

Parents emphasize that the internalization of religious values affects the way teenagers think and their emotional stability. They observe positive changes in their children's behavior, especially in emotional control and decision-making.

*“Since he has been diligent in worship, his way of thinking has become more mature. If there's a problem, he doesn't get angry right away, but stays quiet and thinks more.”*

In addition, parents also see that religious understanding helps teenagers distinguish between good and bad behavior.

*“Now he knows what is right and wrong, often says 'it's not good according*

*to religion,' so he is more controlled."*

### ***Interview with a Community Leader***

Community leaders stated that teenagers who are active in religious activities tend to exhibit emotional calmness and a clearer moral mindset.

*"Children who often attend religious study sessions appear calmer, more polite, and know their boundaries in socializing."*

From the perspective of religious figures, religious values serve as a cognitive framework that helps teenagers control themselves.

*"Religion becomes a brake for them. Once they understand it, their emotions are usually more controlled and they don't easily follow along."*

The results of this study indicate that the internalization of religious values plays an important role in shaping the cognitive and emotional aspects of adolescents' moral values in Medan Denai District. These findings are strongly related to various literature on developmental psychology and character education. The internalization of religious values observed in adolescents, manifested as awareness in assessing right and wrong behavior and making thoughtful decisions, aligns with the concept of moral reasoning in developmental psychology, which emphasizes the importance of a value framework as a guide for thinking and acting (Kohlberg, 1984). Adolescents who are active in religious practices demonstrate self-restraint and mature moral judgment, as also observed in previous studies highlighting that religious involvement can enhance cognitive abilities in ethical decision-making (Sulistyo, 2020; Rahmawati & Prasetyo, 2021).

In addition to the cognitive dimension, the internalization of religious values has a significant influence on adolescents' emotional regulation. The interview findings indicate that regular religious practices and participation in religious activities help adolescents calm themselves, reduce anger, and manage anxiety. These findings are consistent with the concepts of emotional regulation and coping in developmental psychology, which emphasize that effective emotional management is closely associated with active engagement in spiritual practices and

self-reflection (Gross, 2015; Fitriani & Hidayat, 2019). Parents and community leaders also emphasized that religious values function as a cognitive and emotional framework that shapes clear moral reasoning and adaptive social behavior, in line with the buffering hypothesis, which suggests that the support of religious values and practices can serve as a protective buffer against psychosocial stress (Cohen & Wills, 1985).

Furthermore, the internalization of religious values appears to foster the development of self-control and the consistent strengthening of moral awareness. Adolescents who actively engage in religious practices demonstrate a greater ability to restrain themselves in situations requiring rapid decision-making and to consider moral consequences before acting. This finding is relevant to the study by Pargament et al. (2013), which shows that religious coping—through worship practices and spiritual reflection—enhances psychological resilience and improves overall well-being. Within the context of character education, these adaptive strategies provide evidence of the integration of religious values in the holistic formation of adolescents' attitudes and behaviors (Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2015).

Overall, this discussion underscores that the internalization of religious values not only shapes cognitive aspects such as moral reasoning and decision-making but also supports emotional regulation and the development of positive social awareness. These findings not only confirm previous research but also contribute important insights for the development of religious value-based character education programs in schools, families, and communities. Accordingly, this study highlights the need for educational approaches that integrate religious habituation, moral guidance, and the strengthening of emotional regulation skills to foster adolescents who are both cognitively competent and emotionally mature.

### Religious Awareness and the Integration of Worship into Social Life

The observational findings indicate that religious awareness among adolescents in Medan Denai District is reflected not only in the performance of individual religious practices but also in the integration of worship values into everyday social life. Adolescents with a high level of religious awareness

consistently perform obligatory religious practices and demonstrate social concern through attitudes of mutual respect, helpfulness, and ethical conduct in their interactions with the surrounding community.

In the social context, observations reveal that religious practices contribute to the development of social responsibility and discipline. Adolescents who actively participate in religious activities within mosque-based or community settings tend to be more involved in communal social activities, such as community service and collective religious events. This integration of worship and social life indicates that religious values are understood not merely as ritual obligations but as moral guidelines for social behavior.

Conversely, adolescents who are less consistent in their religious practices tend to display fluctuating levels of social engagement and less stable application of moral values, particularly in maintaining commitment and social responsibility. Overall, these observational findings suggest that deeply internalized religious awareness encourages the formation of balanced moral values among adolescents, integrating both spiritual and social dimensions in Medan Denai District. The observational findings are also consistent with the interview data, which are presented in the following section.

### ***Interview with Teenagers***

Interview with TeenagersThe results of the interview show that teenagers understand worship not only as a ritual obligation but also as a guideline for social interaction. The informants stated that the practice of worship encourages them to be more disciplined, responsible, and respectful toward others in daily life.

*“After praying, it feels wrong to do strange things. So, I try to be more careful with my behavior around friends and people at home.”*

Teenagers also revealed that involvement in religious activities helps them become more caring towards their social environment.

*“If I join mosque activities, I often meet people and learn to work together. So I don't just think about myself.”*

### ***Interview with Parents***

Parents stated that religious awareness directly affects the social attitudes of teenagers. They observed that children who consistently practice their faith tend to show better social concern and ethics in their interactions.

*“My child is now more caring; if there are activities in the neighborhood, he wants to join. He used to be more indifferent.”*

In addition, parents believe that worship shapes a sense of social responsibility in teenagers.

*“If he is diligent in worship, he is more aware of his responsibilities, both at home and outside,”*

### ***Interview with a Community Leader***

Community leaders or religious figures emphasize that the integration of worship and social life is an important indicator of the success of youth moral development. Teenagers who are active in religious activities are considered easier to guide and have a higher sense of social responsibility.

*“Children who are active in the mosque are usually more disciplined and easy to cooperate with in social activities.”*

Religious figures also added that worship serves as a moral foundation in building healthy social relationships.

*“If someone keeps up with their religious practices, usually their social behavior is also good, because religion indeed teaches the relationship with God and with others.”*

The findings of this study indicate that religious awareness among adolescents in Medan Denai District plays a crucial role in shaping moral values that are balanced between spiritual and social dimensions. Observational data show that adolescents with a high level of religious awareness are not only consistent in performing individual religious practices but also integrate the values of worship into their daily social interactions, such as showing mutual respect, helping others, and maintaining ethical conduct. This finding is consistent with the study by Kartini et al. (2021), which states that the internalization of religious values not only shapes

the spiritual dimension but also positively influences adolescents' social behavior. In the social context, consistent religious practices have been shown to foster the development of social responsibility and discipline. Adolescents who actively participate in religious activities in mosques or community settings tend to be more involved in communal social activities, such as community service and collective religious events. This finding supports the argument of Pargament et al. (2013), who demonstrated that sustained religious involvement enhances prosocial motivation, a sense of responsibility, and concern for the social environment. Thus, the integration of worship and social life reflects an understanding of religious values as moral guidelines rather than merely ritual obligations.

The interview findings involving adolescents, parents, and community leaders further reinforce the observational results. Adolescents acknowledged that religious practices influence their social behavior by enhancing discipline and responsibility. Parents emphasized that adolescents who consistently engage in religious practices tend to exhibit higher levels of social concern and ethical conduct in their social interactions, while community leaders highlighted that adolescents who are active in religious activities are easier to guide and tend to develop healthier social relationships. These findings are consistent with the study by Santoso and Lestari (2022), which shows that religious involvement within the community strengthens adolescents' social competence and promotes prosocial behavior.

Conversely, adolescents who are less consistent in their religious practices tend to display fluctuating levels of social engagement and less stability in the application of moral values, particularly with regard to commitment and social responsibility. This result aligns with the findings of Nuraini (2020), which emphasize that low consistency in religious practice may weaken the internalization of moral values and the development of adaptive social attitudes.

Overall, this discussion confirms that deeply internalized religious awareness encourages the holistic development of adolescents' moral behavior by integrating spiritual and social dimensions. These findings have important implications for religious value-based character education, whether through the

habituation of religious practices, active participation in religious activities, or the reinforcement of moral values within family and community environments. Such an approach is expected to foster adolescents who are not only spiritually devoted but also socially responsible, disciplined, and caring in their social lives.

### ***Strengthening Interpersonal Relationships and Social Concern as Outcomes of Religiosity***

The observational findings indicate that well-internalized religiosity contributes to the strengthening of interpersonal relationships and increased social concern among adolescents in Medan Denai District. Adolescents who actively engage in religious practices tend to demonstrate empathy, mutual respect, and more positive communication skills in their interactions with family members, peers, and the wider community.

In the social context, observations reveal that adolescents' involvement in religious activities promotes prosocial behaviors, such as willingness to help others, cooperation in community activities, and the maintenance of harmonious social relationships. Adolescents with strong religious awareness tend to be more selective in their social interactions and are better able to establish healthy relationships grounded in values of honesty, responsibility, and mutual respect.

In contrast, adolescents who are less involved in religious activities tend to exhibit more limited interpersonal relationships and fluctuating levels of social concern. Overall, these observational findings suggest that religiosity not only affects individual spiritual dimensions but also plays a significant role in shaping the quality of interpersonal relationships and social concern as integral components of adolescents' moral values in Medan Denai District. These observational findings are also consistent with the interview results, which are presented below.

### ***Interviews with Adolescents***

The interview findings indicate that adolescents perceive religious values as a foundation for building better social relationships. The informants stated that

religious practices help them to respect others more, maintain appropriate behavior in social interactions, and enhance their concern for others.

*“Since getting more involved in religious activities, I’ve been more careful with my words and behavior towards friends. I don’t want to hurt anyone.”*

Teenagers also expressed that involvement in religious activities fosters awareness to help and care for the social environment.

*“If there are activities at the mosque or in the neighborhood, I feel like I want to help. It makes me more aware of my surroundings.”*

### ***Interview with Parents***

Parents observed positive changes in teenagers' social relationships after their religious awareness increased. They assessed that their children became more open, polite, and caring towards family members as well as their surroundings.

*“Now he is more polite and willing to help around the house. The way he talks to others is also gentler.”*

In addition, parents believe that religious values play a role in shaping empathy and social responsibility in teenagers.

*“Once he understands religion, he becomes more caring towards others, not as selfish as before.”*

### ***Interview with a Community Leader***

Community leaders and religious figures emphasize that teenagers who are active in religious activities tend to have healthier interpersonal relationships and higher social awareness.

*“Teenagers who regularly participate in religious activities usually find it easier to socialize and are respected by their peers.”*

Religious figures also added that religiosity encourages the growth of sustainable prosocial behavior.

*“Religion teaches empathy and helping one another. If that is instilled, teenagers become more caring and willing to help others,”*

The findings of this study indicate that well-internalized religiosity

contributes significantly to the strengthening of interpersonal relationships and the enhancement of adolescents' social concern in Medan Denai District. Observational findings show that adolescents who actively engage in religious practices tend to demonstrate empathy, mutual respect, and more positive communication skills in their interactions with family members, peers, and the wider community. This is consistent with the findings of Santrock (2019), who emphasized that religious values function as a moral framework that shapes prosocial behavior and supports the development of adolescents' interpersonal skills.

In the social context, adolescents' involvement in religious activities fosters the emergence of prosocial behaviors, such as willingness to help others, cooperation in community-based activities, and efforts to maintain harmonious social relationships. Adolescents with strong religious awareness also tend to be more selective in their social interactions, build healthy relationships, and emphasize values of honesty, responsibility, and mutual respect. These findings align with the study by Pargament et al. (2013), which suggests that repeated religious practices enhance prosocial motivation and social concern while simultaneously strengthening self-control in interpersonal relationships.

Interviews with adolescents further confirmed that religious practices serve as a foundation for building better social relationships. Parents and community leaders also observed positive changes in adolescents' social interaction patterns. Adolescents who regularly participate in religious activities tend to be more polite, open, and caring toward their families and surrounding environments. This finding is consistent with the study by Maulana et al. (2020), which demonstrates that the internalization of religious values strengthens social competence and fosters empathy and social responsibility among adolescents.

Conversely, adolescents who are less involved in religious activities tend to exhibit relatively limited interpersonal relationships and fluctuating levels of social concern, indicating that low internalization of religious values may negatively affect the quality of social interactions and prosocial abilities (Nuraini, 2020).

Overall, this discussion confirms that internalized religiosity not only affects

individual spiritual dimensions but also plays a crucial role in shaping the quality of interpersonal relationships and social concern as integral components of adolescents' moral values. These findings have important implications for the development of religious value-based character education programs in schools, families, and communities. Such an approach is expected to foster adolescents who are not only spiritually devoted but also empathetic, responsible, and socially caring.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings from observations and interviews, it can be concluded that the internalization of religious values plays a significant role in shaping adolescents' moral values in Medan Denai District across cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions. Religious values function as a cognitive framework that helps adolescents distinguish between right and wrong, consider moral consequences in decision-making, and regulate emotions when facing social pressures. Furthermore, religious awareness integrated with worship practices and social life has been shown to foster discipline, responsibility, social concern, and healthier, more harmonious interpersonal relationships. Fully internalized religiosity not only strengthens individual spirituality but also cultivates empathy, prosocial behavior, and positive social interaction skills among adolescents.

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