



Gender Similarities and Domain-Specific Differences in Religious Motivation among Muslim High School Students in Java

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ABSTRACT

Religious motivation is an important psychological resource for adolescents, yet limited research has examined gender similarities and differences among Muslim students in general high schools, particularly in the Javanese cultural context. This study aimed to examine overall and domain-specific differences in religious motivation between male and female Muslim high school students in Central and East Java. A quantitative comparative design was used involving 754 students, consisting of 446 female and 308 male respondents selected through convenience sampling. Data were collected using the 14-item Religious Motivation Scale, which showed item validity coefficients ranging from .257 to .559 and good internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of .869. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize respondents' characteristics and religious motivation scores, while the Mann-Whitney U test was applied because the normality assumption was not met. The results showed no significant gender difference in overall religious motivation, indicating broad similarity between male and female students. However, small domain-specific differences were found in *ubudiah* practice and avoidance of unethical practices, with female students showing higher mean ranks in both domains. These findings contribute theoretically by showing that gender differences in religious motivation are culturally situated and domain-specific rather than universal or fixed. Practically, the study supports gender-responsive and non-stereotypical Islamic educational counseling programs. The study is limited by convenience sampling, self-report data,

focus on gender, and absence of population-based weighting. Future studies should examine broader contextual factors shaping adolescents' religious motivation.

Keywords: Religious Motivation; Muslim High School Students; Gender Similarities; Islamic Educational Counseling; Javanese Culture

ABSTRAK

Motivasi religius merupakan sumber daya psikologis penting bagi remaja, tetapi kajian tentang persamaan dan perbedaan gender pada siswa Muslim di sekolah menengah umum masih terbatas, khususnya dalam konteks budaya Jawa. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menguji perbedaan motivasi religius secara umum dan berdasarkan domain tertentu antara siswa SMA Muslim laki-laki dan perempuan di Jawa Tengah dan Jawa Timur. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain kuantitatif komparatif dengan melibatkan 754 siswa, terdiri atas 446 responden perempuan dan 308 responden laki-laki yang dipilih melalui teknik *convenience sampling*. Data dikumpulkan menggunakan Skala Motivasi Religius berisi 14 butir, dengan koefisien validitas item berkisar antara 0,257 hingga 0,559 dan reliabilitas internal yang baik, ditunjukkan oleh nilai alpha Cronbach sebesar 0,869. Statistik deskriptif digunakan untuk menggambarkan karakteristik responden dan skor motivasi religius, sedangkan uji Mann–Whitney U digunakan karena data tidak memenuhi asumsi normalitas. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan tidak terdapat perbedaan signifikan motivasi religius secara umum antara siswa laki-laki dan perempuan. Namun, terdapat perbedaan kecil pada domain praktik *ubudiah* dan penghindaran terhadap praktik tidak etis, dengan siswa perempuan memiliki peringkat rerata lebih tinggi pada kedua domain tersebut. Temuan ini berkontribusi secara teoretis dengan menunjukkan bahwa perbedaan gender dalam motivasi religius bersifat kontekstual dan spesifik-domain, bukan universal atau tetap. Secara praktis, penelitian ini mendukung pengembangan layanan bimbingan dan konseling pendidikan Islam yang responsif gender dan tidak stereotipis. Penelitian ini terbatas pada teknik sampling, data laporan diri, fokus pada gender, dan tidak adanya pembobotan berbasis populasi. Penelitian selanjutnya perlu mengkaji faktor kontekstual yang lebih luas dalam membentuk motivasi religius remaja.

Kata kunci: Motivasi Religius; Siswa SMA Muslim; Persamaan Gender; Bimbingan dan Konseling Pendidikan Islam; Budaya Jawa

INTRODUCTION

Religious motivation is a fundamental psychological force that shapes individuals' attitudes, choices, and behaviors within spiritual contexts (Park, 2021). It refers to a spiritual orientation grounded in one's relationship with God and the aspiration to embody divine values in daily life (Heydari et al., 2020; Michaels et al., 2021; Zanga Céspedes et al., 2025). Among adolescents, religious motivation is particularly important because it is associated with psychosocial competence, emotional well-being, moral development, identity formation, and positive behavioral outcomes (Alshakhshir & Montgomery, 2022; Vaingankar et al., 2022; Rezta & Rahmatullah, 2025; Hardy et al., 2022, 2025).

Religious motivation is also central to counseling, especially in religious and faith-based contexts. It can support meaning-making, coping strategies, moral reasoning, value formation, interpersonal functioning, and commitment to spiritual practices (Salem & Hijazi, 2019; Setyawan et al., 2025; Sutoyo et al., 2023; Lloyd et al., 2026; Rasool et al., 2024). Religion may strengthen the counselor–client relationship by providing values and principles that support therapeutic dialogue, although counselors must respect clients' religious beliefs and assess their religious motivation carefully before integrating religious elements into practice (Akib et al., 2025; Curry & Haddock, 2025).

Indonesia provides an important context for examining adolescent religious motivation because Islam is the predominant religion while coexisting with substantial cultural and religious diversity (Allès & Seeth, 2021; Ronaldi et al., 2023; Woodward, 2019). Family, community, school, and curriculum-based religious education play key roles in shaping adolescents' religious beliefs, practices, learning behavior, and moral orientation (Atmoko, Machfudz, et al., 2022; Shodiq et al., 2025). Senior high school students are at a developmental stage marked by identity exploration, value internalization, independence, and religious identity formation, making this group important for understanding how religious motivation develops within social and educational contexts (Alghanam & Shehadeh, 2025; Goldstein, 2020; Iannello et al., 2019).

Gender is a significant issue in religious motivation and counseling research because male and female students may experience different social expectations, religious roles, and patterns of value internalization. In Java and Indonesia more broadly, gender differences in counseling intersect with cultural norms, traditional values, religious beliefs, and

educational experiences (Atmoko, Hambali, et al., 2022; Atmoko, Saputra, et al., 2022; Eliasa et al., 2025; Habsy et al., 2025; Irawan et al., 2025). Understanding these dynamics is important for developing culturally responsive counseling and pedagogical strategies that address students' needs without reinforcing gender stereotypes (Astarina et al., 2025). Although religiosity has been linked to psychological well-being, social behavior, and religious practice, studies specifically examining religious motivation and gender differences remain limited.

The gender issue is especially relevant in Java, where social structures are shaped by complex cultural norms, patriarchal expectations, and traditional concepts such as *kanca wingking*, which may limit women's participation and reinforce gender role stereotypes (Manalu et al., 2024; Salsabila et al., 2025; Siregar et al., 2026). Previous findings on gender and religiosity are inconsistent. Some studies report that males demonstrate higher Islamic religiosity, while females show deeper spiritual and emotional religious experiences (Reza et al., 2024). Other studies suggest that gender does not significantly influence religiousness, although it may moderate the relationship between religious learning and student discipline (Fitriani et al., 2022). These mixed findings indicate that gender differentiation in religious motivation should be examined within specific cultural and educational contexts.

Examining gender differences in religious motivation is also important for Islamic educational counseling. Religious motivation can help students navigate adversity, strengthen resilience, improve life satisfaction, and support the integration of religious-based techniques into counseling for Muslim students (Wanto et al., 2022; Sanjana et al., 2025). At the same time, religion may also involve struggles, doubts, and conflicts that intensify psychological distress, requiring counselors to address both the supportive and challenging dimensions of religious life (Cohen et al., 2025). This dual role makes religious motivation a relevant construct for designing counseling interventions that are spiritually grounded, psychologically sensitive, and culturally appropriate.

Java offers a distinctive cultural setting because religion is deeply embedded in language, social interaction, ethical norms, and collective identity (Rohmadi et al., 2025). Existing studies on religious motivation and religiosity in Javanese or Indonesian contexts have focused more on educational, cultural, and religious settings where religious values are explicitly institutionalized in daily life. Muslim students in general high schools remain

underexamined, even though this group represents a large population whose religious motivation is shaped by school curriculum, family expectations, peer interaction, local culture, and modernization.

Gender motivation theory provides a useful framework for analyzing possible differences in religious motivation. Drawing on social role theory, this perspective explains that men and women may develop different motivational orientations across social contexts, with men often associated with status enhancement and women with risk reduction or prevention-oriented motivation (Becker et al., 2026; Bentzen et al., 2026). In religious contexts, these orientations may shape how adolescents engage in worship, avoid unethical behavior, respond to moral expectations, and interpret religious responsibility. However, gendered motivation should be viewed as dynamic and context-dependent rather than fixed or universal.

In the Javanese context, adolescent religiosity develops through the integration of Islamic values and local wisdom (Sholehuddin et al., 2026). Religious practices are often introduced in families as expressions of respect, social harmony, and moral discipline, including through courteous speech and community-based religious traditions such as study groups (Widiastuti et al., 2026; Hasanah, 2020; Sirait, 2020). Religiosity is therefore not limited to ritual frequency but also reflects the internalization of values that influence daily behavior, social relationships, and moral judgment. This makes religious motivation a critical construct for understanding the depth of value internalization among adolescents.

Contemporary Java is also experiencing shifts in gender relations. Women increasingly challenge patriarchal norms, especially when religious arguments are used to justify male dominance, while evolving interpretations of Islamic teachings support more egalitarian perspectives (Putri & Poerwandari, 2023). Some men are also beginning to participate more actively in domestic responsibilities, reflecting changes in cultural and religious attitudes toward gender roles (Kiram, 2026). These changes strengthen the need to examine whether male and female Muslim high school students differ in religious motivation or whether shared religious and cultural socialization produces more similarities than differences.

Based on these gaps, this study investigates gender similarities and differences in religious motivation among Muslim senior high school students in Java. Specifically, it

examines whether male and female students differ in overall religious motivation and in specific domains of religious motivation. The findings are expected to support teachers and counselors in developing gender-sensitive Islamic education and counseling programs and to contribute to the literature by clarifying religious motivation as a phenomenon shaped by individual, gendered, educational, and cultural contexts.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative comparative design to examine gender similarities and differences in religious motivation among Muslim high school students in Central and East Java (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This design was selected because the study aimed to compare religious motivation scores between two independent groups, namely male and female students. The research procedure consisted of five stages, as illustrated in Figure 1. First, the research problem was defined by focusing on gender-based similarities and differences in religious motivation among Muslim high school students. Second, participants were recruited from senior high schools in Central and East Java. Third, participants were grouped based on gender. Fourth, data were collected using the Religious Motivation Scale. Fifth, descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were conducted to examine overall and domain-specific differences in religious motivation between male and female students.

The target population of this study consisted of Muslim high school students in Central and East Java. A convenience sampling technique was used because the study required access to school-based respondents across two provinces. A total of 754 students participated in the study, consisting of 446 female students and 308 male students. The inclusion criteria were as follows: participants had to be Muslim, be enrolled as high school students, study in Central or East Java, and voluntarily agree to complete the Religious Motivation Scale. Because the study used convenience sampling, the findings should be interpreted as reflecting the characteristics of the participating sample rather than as population-level estimates. This sampling approach may restrict the generalizability of the findings beyond the sampled respondents (Liu et al., 2024).

Religious motivation was measured using the 14-item Religious Motivation Scale developed by Atmoko, Hambali, et al. (2022). The scale measures seven domains of

religious motivation: intention to please Allah, mastery and experience of religious knowledge, task completion as *ubudiah* practice, task completion as *muamalah* practice, avoidance of unethical practices, use of feedback for worship improvement, and opportunity utilization. Each domain is represented by two items. Item validity was examined using item-total correlation, with coefficients ranging from .257 to .559. The scale demonstrated good internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .869. These results indicate that the instrument was acceptable for measuring religious motivation among the study participants.

The use of a domain-based instrument was considered appropriate because this study did not only aim to measure students' general religious motivation but also to identify specific areas in which gender similarities or differences might appear. The seven domains of the scale cover worship orientation, religious knowledge, ethical conduct, social responsibility, feedback use, and opportunity utilization. This structure allowed the analysis to move beyond a single global score and examine whether gender differences were present in particular aspects of religious motivation (Atmoko, Hambali, et al., 2022).

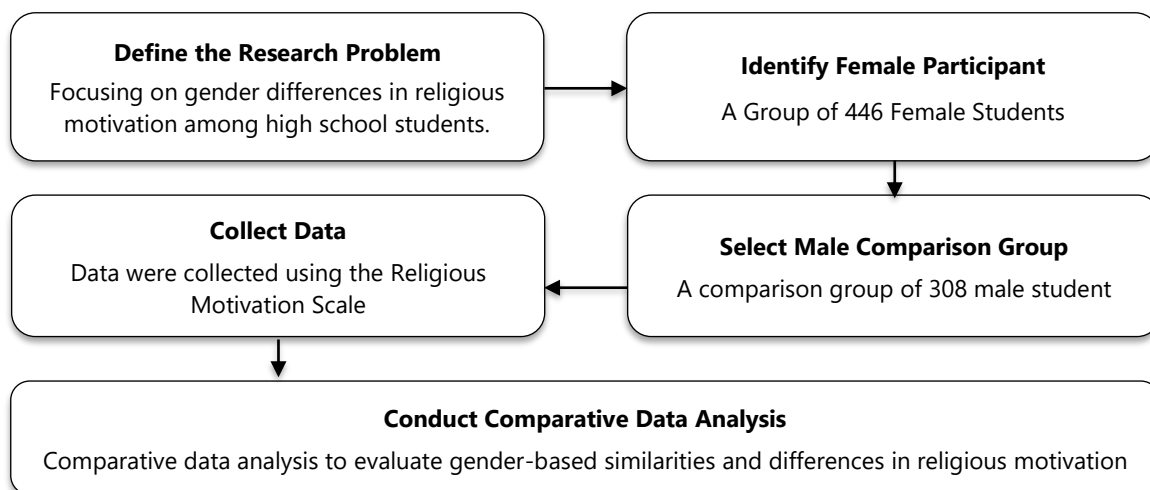


Figure 1. The Comparative Research Process Applied in the Study to Examine Gender Similarities and Differences

Table 1.

Distribution of Research Participants

Province	N	%	Female	Male
Central Java	505	66.9	306	199
East Java	249	33.1	140	109
Total	754	100.0	446	308

Table 2.

Religious Motivation Scale

Variable	Aspect	Item Numbers
Religious Motivation	Intention to please Allah	1, 8
Religious Motivation	Mastery and experience of religious knowledge	2, 9
Religious Motivation	Task completion as <i>ubudiah</i> practice	3, 10
Religious Motivation	Task completion as <i>muamalah</i> practice	4, 11
Religious Motivation	Avoidance of unethical practices	5, 12
Religious Motivation	Use of feedback for worship improvement	6, 13
Religious Motivation	Opportunity utilization	7, 14

Data were collected online using Google Forms after obtaining permission from the participating schools. Before completing the questionnaire, participants received information about the purpose of the study, voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, and their right not to continue participation. Participant assent/consent was obtained through an agreement statement before they accessed the questionnaire. The questionnaire did not collect personal identifiers, such as names, student numbers, phone numbers, or addresses, to protect respondents' privacy. Several procedures were applied to improve data quality. First, the Google Forms setting was adjusted to allow only one response from each participant. Second, responses with extremely short completion times were screened because they might indicate careless responding. Third, responses with highly similar or repetitive answer patterns were reviewed and removed when they indicated invalid or careless responses. Only complete and valid responses were included in the final analysis.

Data analysis was conducted in several stages. First, descriptive statistics were used to summarize respondents' demographic characteristics and religious motivation scores. Because the study used convenience sampling and did not have official population parameters for gender distribution among Muslim high school students in Central and East Java, no post-stratification weighting was applied. Assumption testing was then conducted to determine the appropriate comparative procedure. The Kolmogorov–Smirnov normality test indicated that the religious motivation data were not normally distributed because the significance value was below .05. The homogeneity test showed that the variance between male and female groups was homogeneous, with Levene's $F = 1.007$ and $p = .316$. Because the normality assumption was not met, the Mann–Whitney U test was used as a non-

parametric alternative to compare religious motivation between male and female students. The analysis was conducted for both the overall religious motivation score and each specific domain of religious motivation. Effect size was calculated using the formula $r = |Z|/\sqrt{N}$ to determine the practical magnitude of gender differences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive data were obtained from 754 Muslim high school students who completed the Religious Motivation Scale. As presented in Table 3, the largest proportion of respondents was 17 years old, comprising 320 students (42.4%). This was followed by students aged 16 years ($n = 189$; 25.1%), students aged 15 years or younger ($n = 180$; 23.9%), and students aged 18 years or older ($n = 65$; 8.6%). The mean age of the respondents was 16.34 years, indicating that the participants represented middle-to-late adolescence.

In terms of grade level, most respondents were in Grade 11 ($n = 331$; 43.9%), followed by Grade 10 ($n = 297$; 39.4%) and Grade 12 ($n = 126$; 16.7%). Regarding gender distribution, female students accounted for 446 respondents (59.2%), whereas male students accounted for 308 respondents (40.8%). Based on regional distribution, 505 respondents (66.9%) came from Central Java, while 249 respondents (33.1%) came from East Java. Overall, the sample was dominated by female students, Grade 11 students, and respondents from Central Java.

Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics of religious motivation by gender. The overall mean score of religious motivation was 35.24 ($SD = 4.77$), with scores ranging from 15.00 to 56.00. Female students obtained a slightly higher mean score ($M = 35.43$; $SD = 4.47$) than male students ($M = 35.03$; $SD = 4.70$). The score range among female students was 23.00 to 56.00, while the score range among male students was 15.00 to 51.00.

Regarding category distribution, the largest proportion of respondents fell within the medium category of religious motivation, comprising 276 students (36.6%), followed by the low category with 256 students (34.0%) and the high category with 222 students (29.4%). Among female students ($n = 446$), 160 (35.8%) were classified as having medium religious motivation, 148 (33.1%) as low, and 138 (31.1%) as high. Among male students ($n = 308$), 116 (37.7%) were in the medium category, 108 (35.0%) in the low category, and 84 (27.3%) in the high category. These results suggest that both male and female students

predominantly exhibited moderate levels of religious motivation, with female students displaying marginally higher levels overall.

Table 5 presents the results of the Mann–Whitney U test. The analysis showed no significant gender difference in overall religious motivation ($U = 59688.0$, $Z = -1.203$, $p = .229$). This finding indicates that female and male students did not differ significantly in their general level of religious motivation. At the domain level, five aspects also showed no significant gender differences: importance of pleasing Allah ($p = .761$), mastery and experience of religious knowledge ($p = .662$), *muamalah* practice ($p = .263$), use of feedback for worship improvement ($p = .434$), and opportunity utilization ($p = .438$). However, two domains showed significant differences: *ubudiah* practice ($U = 56804.0$, $Z = -2.277$, $p = .023$) and avoidance of unethical practices ($U = 55241.0$, $Z = -2.749$, $p = .006$). In both domains, female students had higher mean ranks than male students.

Effect size calculations indicated that the significant differences were small. The effect size for *ubudiah* practice was $r = .08$, while the effect size for avoidance of unethical practices was $r = .10$. These results suggest that, although statistically significant differences were found in two specific domains, the practical magnitude of these differences was limited. Overall, the findings indicate broad gender similarity in religious motivation, with small domain-specific differences in *ubudiah* practice and avoidance of unethical practices.

Table 3.
Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n= 754)

Criteria	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Age		
≤15	180	23.9
16	189	25.1
17	320	42.4
≥18	65	8.6
Mean age	16.34	
Grade Level		
10th	297	39.4
11th	331	43.9
12th	126	16.7
Gender		
Male	308	40.8
Female	446	59.2
Region		
Central Java	505	66.9
East Java	249	33.1

Table 4.

Description Statistics of Religious Motivation by Gender

Variable	All Respondents	Female	Male
Religious Motivation			
<i>Minimum Score</i>	15.00	23.00	15.00
<i>Maximum Score</i>	56.00	56.00	51.00
<i>Mean</i>	35.24	35.43	35.03
<i>Std. Deviation</i>	4.77	4.47	4.70
Category of Religious Motivation			
<i>Low</i>	256 (34%)	148 (33.1%)	108 (35%)
<i>Medium</i>	276 (36.6%)	160 (35.8%)	116 (37.7%)
<i>High</i>	222 (29.4%)	138 (31.1%)	84 (27.3%)

Table 5.

Comparing the mean result for the variable

Variable	Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	p	Female Mean Rank	Male Mean Rank	Interpretation
Religious motivation	59688	76159	-1.203	0.229	446.23	420.77	Not significant
Importance of pleasing Allah	62472	307822	-0.304	0.761	439.75	445.85	Not significant
Mastery and experience of religious knowledge	62090	78561	-0.437	0.662	442.8	434.04	Not significant
<i>Ubudiah</i> practice	56804	73275	-2.277	0.023	450.35	404.83	Significant
<i>Muamalah</i> practice	60137	305487	-1.12	0.263	436.41	458.75	Not significant
Avoidance of unethical practices	55241	71712	-2.749	0.006	452.58	396.2	Significant
Use of feedback for worship improvement	61099	77570	-0.782	0.434	444.22	428.56	Not significant
Opportunity utilization	61201	306551	-0.775	0.438	437.93	452.87	Not significant

This equality in religious motivation among male and female Muslim students in Java can be understood as the result of collective and cultural internalization of religious values within Javanese society. Religious values are not merely abstract beliefs but are embodied in daily worship, religious traditions, moral communication, and social interactions shaped by communal norms (Anshori et al., 2024; Hanif & Marpuah, 2024). Such collective

internalization may explain why male and female students showed comparable levels of overall religious motivation, as both groups are exposed to similar religious expectations within family, school, and community life.

Of the seven aspects of religious motivation, two showed significant differences between male and female students. Female respondents demonstrated higher engagement in *ubudiah* practice and avoidance of unethical practices. This finding can be interpreted through gender motivation theory, which suggests that men and women may develop different motivational orientations across social and religious contexts (Becker et al., 2026). These tendencies may explain why female students showed stronger motivation in worship-oriented and ethical-avoidance domains. However, the differences should be interpreted cautiously because they appeared only in specific domains, not in overall religious motivation.

In the remaining five aspects, no significant differences were observed between male and female students. This finding suggests that religious motivation among Javanese Muslim adolescents is shaped more by shared educational and cultural environments than by gender alone. Formal education, family religious expectations, community-based religious practices, and broader access to Islamic learning in Java may contribute to relatively similar religious socialization between boys and girls. This interpretation is consistent with the view that Indonesian Islamic education and religious life are shaped by the interaction between institutional learning, cultural identity, and communal religious practice (Allès & Seeth, 2021; Wanto et al., 2022; Woodward, 2019).

The findings are also consistent with broader studies showing that gender differentiation in religion is complex because religion is deeply integrated into social and cultural life. Gender differences may appear in particular forms of religious expression, but they do not always produce substantial differences in overall religiosity or religious motivation. In some global contexts, women tend to report stronger religious participation and belief, while men may be shaped by different social motives related to status, roles, and resource provision (Moon et al., 2022; Ko et al., 2026). These comparisons suggest that gender differences in religiosity should be understood as context-dependent rather than universal.

Enhancing religious motivation among high school students in Java requires a multidimensional approach that is pedagogically robust, culturally relevant, and psychologically supportive. In Islamic education, religious motivation should not be reduced to ritual compliance but should be understood as the meaningful internalization of values, beliefs, and practices that guide behavior. For Javanese adolescents, this approach should consider the interaction between Islamic teachings, local cultural values, family expectations, school experiences, and social change. Integrating Islamic education with culturally grounded counseling may foster deeper and more intrinsic religious motivation, especially when students are encouraged to connect worship, ethical conduct, social responsibility, and personal meaning.

Beyond educational strategies, counseling services are crucial for supporting students' religious motivation, especially in addressing emotional, psychological, and spiritual needs. Counselors can accommodate differences in religious motivation by implementing gender-sensitive Islamic counseling that integrates spiritual values, psychological understanding, and awareness of sociocultural gender roles (Shaik, 2026). From the perspective of Islamic counseling, interventions may be grounded in Islamic creed and spiritual values to help students connect psychological healing with spiritual growth (Zakaria & Mat Akhir, 2019). At the same time, counselors need to recognize that gender socialization may influence how students express and internalize religious motivation. Male students may express religiosity through responsibility, discipline, or institutional participation, while female students may demonstrate stronger emotional spirituality, interpersonal religious coping, or reflective faith experiences (Cohen et al., 2025; Lloyd et al., 2026).

These distinctions do not indicate the superiority of one gender over another but rather different pathways through which religious meaning is constructed and maintained. Counselors should therefore adapt communication styles, intervention strategies, and spiritual approaches according to students' motivational tendencies and personal religious experiences. Female students may benefit from approaches emphasizing emotional expression, empathy, and relational support, whereas male students may respond more positively to solution-focused discussions, responsibility-oriented spiritual reflection, or structured religious goal setting. Counselors should also avoid reinforcing rigid gender stereotypes and instead provide a supportive environment where both male and female

students can develop authentic religious motivation consistent with their identities and spiritual needs.

When combined with Islamic principles, gender-sensitive counseling offers a holistic model that addresses both spiritual and psychological dimensions (Hakim et al., 2025; Sutoyo et al., 2023). Students may be guided to reflect on intention, moral responsibility, sincerity, and trust in God as part of their religious and psychological development. Techniques such as guided reflection, journaling, and structured self-reflection may also be adapted to include prayer, Qur'anic recitation, remembrance, and other Islamic reflective practices (Pujianti et al., 2025). The effectiveness of Islamic education and counseling also depends on collaboration among educators, counselors, parents, religious leaders, and the wider community (Ifdil et al., 2023). Schools may organize workshops, group guidance, peer support, and community-based programs to strengthen students' religious motivation in a sustainable way (Kholiq et al., 2025).

Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature on religious motivation by demonstrating that gender differences among Muslim high school students in Java are not reflected in overall religious motivation but appear only in specific domains. This finding refines the application of gender motivation theory in Islamic educational contexts by showing that gendered motivational patterns should be interpreted as culturally situated and domain-specific rather than universal or fixed. The small differences found in *ubudiah* practice and avoidance of unethical practices suggest that religious motivation is shaped by the interaction between gender socialization, Islamic values, and Javanese cultural norms. This contribution is important because it shifts the interpretation of gender in religious motivation from a binary comparison toward a more contextual understanding of how adolescents internalize and express religious values.

Practically, this study provides guidance for Islamic educational counseling by emphasizing the need for gender-responsive, domain-based, and non-stereotypical programs. Counselors and Islamic education teachers should not assume that male students have lower religious motivation or that female students are automatically more religious. Instead, student support programs should assess specific domains of religious motivation, including worship motivation, ethical awareness, religious reflection, and spiritual self-regulation. Counseling programs can integrate Islamic values, culturally grounded

reflection, peer support, journaling, and school-community collaboration to help both male and female students strengthen religious motivation in ways that are meaningful for their developmental and cultural contexts.

This study is subject to several limitations. First, the study examined only one main variable, namely gender differences in religious motivation, while other relevant factors such as family religiosity, school climate, peer influence, socioeconomic background, and the quality of religious education were not included. Second, the quantitative approach did not allow in-depth exploration of the subjective meanings of religiosity in students' lived experiences. Third, the focus on the Javanese context may limit the generalizability of the findings because religious motivation may be expressed differently in other cultural communities. Fourth, reliance on self-report instruments may introduce social desirability bias, particularly because religiosity is strongly shaped by social norms and expectations.

In light of these limitations, future research should incorporate qualitative, mixed-method, longitudinal, and cross-regional designs to gain deeper insight into how students internalize Islamic cultural and educational values. Further studies should also examine family influence, school culture, peer relationships, digital religious engagement, the quality of religious education, and the dynamics of religious communities to provide a more comprehensive understanding of students' religious motivation.

CONCLUSION

This study found that overall religious motivation among the participating Muslim high school students in Central and East Java did not differ significantly between male and female students, indicating broad gender similarity in students' religious motivation. However, small domain-specific differences were identified in *ubudiah* practice and avoidance of unethical practices, with female students showing higher mean ranks in both domains. These findings contribute theoretically to the literature on religious motivation by showing that gender differences should be understood as domain-specific and culturally situated rather than universal or fixed. Practically, the study provides guidance for Islamic educational counseling by emphasizing the need for gender-responsive, non-stereotypical, and domain-based counseling programs that strengthen students' worship motivation, ethical awareness, religious reflection, and spiritual self-regulation. This study is limited by

its focus on gender as the main variable, its quantitative self-report design, convenience sampling, the absence of population-based weighting, and its sample restricted to Muslim high school students in Central and East Java, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research should employ qualitative, mixed-method, longitudinal, and cross-regional designs to examine how family religiosity, school climate, peer influence, digital religious engagement, and the quality of Islamic education shape students' religious motivation in broader Muslim adolescent populations.

Ethics Statement

This study did not require formal ethical approval because the data were collected anonymously through voluntary online questionnaires and posed minimal risk to participants. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, confidentiality, privacy, and anonymity prior to participation. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process.

Declaration of Generative AI Use

The authors used Grammarly to assist with language editing and readability improvement. The authors have reviewed, edited, and verified all AI-assisted content and accept full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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