

Humanistic-Religious Guidance and Reported Spiritual Change among Children in Conflict with the Law in Indonesia

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Abstract

Guidance for children in conflict with the law must address institutional accountability while recognizing their psychological, educational, and spiritual needs. Previous studies have examined legal protection, counseling, education, and religious programs in juvenile correctional institutions but provide limited explanation of how person-centered relationships and Islamic spiritual practices are combined in everyday guidance. This qualitative single-case study examined the implementation of humanistic-religious guidance at *Lembaga Pembinaan Khusus Anak Kelas I Kutoarjo* (LPKA Kutoarjo), an Indonesian juvenile correctional institution. It also examined participant-reported changes in spiritual awareness and the conditions supporting or constraining the approach. Data were obtained from five purposively selected participants—three staff members and two participating children—through semi-structured interviews, 15–20 hours of nonparticipant observation over five consecutive days, and institutional document analysis. The analysis identified seven interconnected elements: unconditional acceptance, empathy, congruence, *muhasabah* (self-reflection), *taubat nasuha* (sincere repentance), *muraqabah* (awareness of being observed by God), and *ihsan* (worship and moral conduct grounded in awareness of God). These elements were expressed across staff–child interactions, reflective activities, religious routines, equivalency education, and digital-library use. The two participating children described emotional-regulation efforts, regular worship, Quranic learning, and participation in scheduled religious activities. Interview accounts identified staff competence, institutional cooperation, and educational facilities as supporting conditions, and varied backgrounds, limited placement periods, reading difficulties, shame, withdrawal, and despair as constraints.

Keywords: *Humanistic-Religious Guidance; Juvenile Offenders; Spiritual Awareness; Person-Centered Approach*

A. Introduction

Children in conflict with the law require an institutional response that addresses legal accountability while preserving their rights, dignity, and developmental needs, as reflected in Indonesia's juvenile justice and correctional frameworks and in international child-justice standards (Indonesia 2012, 2022;

United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child 2019). Legal and psychological scholarship similarly argues that child protection should account for children's physical, mental, and social development rather than rely on punishment alone (Parawansa, Nawi, and Badaru 2022). Data from the Indonesian National Police's National Crime Information Center recorded 21,945 children and young people under the age of 20 as being involved in legal cases during 2025 (Pusiknas Bareskrim Polri 2025). Although this figure includes young people above the legal definition of a child, it indicates the continuing scale of juvenile involvement in criminal cases. Existing Indonesian research has consequently examined restorative justice, diversion, legal protection, and institutional guidance as means of supporting rehabilitation and social reintegration (Aji 2019; Mayliyanti et al. 2025; Sagita 2025; Zenegger, Ismansyah, and Zurnetti 2024).

Rehabilitation within a juvenile correctional institution also involves psychological and relational challenges. International reviews likewise report substantial mental-health and developmental concerns among justice-involved youth and caution that confinement may compound rather than resolve those needs (Barnert et al. 2017; Lambie and Randell 2013; Underwood and Washington 2016). Research on center-based youth also shows that identity and self-understanding are negotiated during and after institutional placement (Banzon-Librojo 2025). Studies of children in conflict with the law have identified stress, difficulties in adaptation, shame, low self-esteem, and negative self-concepts that may complicate their participation in institutional programs (Amikola, Pramudiani, and Iranda 2024; Situmorang 2025). At *Lembaga Pembinaan Khusus Anak Kelas I Kutoarjo* (LPKA Kutoarjo), counseling and education have been examined primarily as rights that institutions are required to provide, although limitations in facilities, personnel, and program coverage have also been reported (Putri and Subekti 2022; Wulan and Sasmita 2022). These conditions suggest that guidance cannot be understood solely as the enforcement of institutional rules. The quality of interactions between children and correctional staff is also relevant to how children interpret and respond to the guidance they receive.

Carl Rogers's person-centered approach provides a relational framework based on unconditional positive regard, empathy, and congruence. In an Islamic guidance context, these principles may be connected with spiritual concepts such as *taubat nasuha* (sincere repentance), *maghfirah* (divine forgiveness), *muraqabah* (awareness of being observed by God), and *ihsan* (worship and moral conduct grounded in awareness of God). Rogers (1957) identifies empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence as relational conditions for therapeutic change. Broader psychotherapy research indicates that attention to clients' religious and spiritual commitments can be integrated into treatment without assuming that

religious adaptation alone produces superior psychological outcomes (Captari et al. 2018). These literatures provide a conceptual rationale for examining humanistic-religious guidance, but they do not demonstrate how such a combination is practiced in a juvenile correctional institution or how children interpret it.

Previous research at LPKA Kutoarjo has addressed counseling provision, educational rights, family involvement, and a Quran-based forgiveness intervention (Fernando 2025; Putri and Subekti 2022; Saputro and Rifani 2024; Wulan and Sasmita 2022). Studies in other Indonesian juvenile institutions have documented character-development programs, dialogical staff-child communication, and institutional guidance shaped by family, motivation, facilities, and organizational conditions (Lalo 2025; Pasaribu and Widodo 2024; Rorandi, Danial, and Muthaqin 2025). Research in other juvenile correctional institutions has also examined religious guidance and persuasive communication (Celia 2025). These studies establish the importance of psychological, educational, and religious support, but they leave limited empirical explanation of how person-centered relationships and Islamic spiritual practices are combined in everyday guidance and how participants describe changes in spiritual awareness within that process. The present study addresses this narrower gap through a qualitative case study at LPKA Kutoarjo, an Indonesian juvenile correctional institution.

The study therefore examines three questions: How is a humanistic-religious approach implemented in guidance activities at LPKA Kutoarjo? How do participating children and staff describe changes in the children's spiritual awareness? What factors support or constrain the implementation of the approach? Rather than testing the effectiveness of a standardized intervention, the study documents how humanistic principles and Islamic values are interpreted and practiced within one institutional setting. Its contribution is therefore case-specific: it provides an empirical account of the relationships, activities, and institutional conditions associated with humanistic-religious guidance at LPKA Kutoarjo.

B. Methods

This study employed a qualitative single-case design to examine the implementation of humanistic-religious guidance at LPKA Kutoarjo, a juvenile correctional institution in Purworejo Regency, Central Java. A case study was appropriate because the research focused on guidance practices, participants' accounts of changes in spiritual awareness, and the institutional conditions surrounding those practices within one bounded setting. The design was intended to produce a contextual account rather than to measure the effectiveness of an intervention or establish causal relationships.

Participants were selected purposively based on their involvement in, or experience of, the guidance program. Five participants were included: one community development supervisor, one LPKA psychologist, one officer from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and two children participating in the program. The two children had resided at the institution for at least six months and were considered psychologically stable and able to participate cooperatively, based on the recommendation of the LPKA psychologist. This period enabled them to describe their experience of the program, although it did not establish that they had completed an identical or standardized guidance cycle.

Table 1.
Research Participants

No.	Participant role	Code
1	Community development supervisor	AP
2	LPKA psychologist	MU
3	Ministry of Religious Affairs officer	IS
4	Participating child	AA
5	Participating child	AB

Source: Authors' field data, 2026

Data were collected through non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Observations were conducted over five consecutive days for approximately 15–20 hours in total. They covered morning assemblies, communal prayers, group counseling and motivational activities, vocational activities, religious programs, and informal interactions. The researchers recorded the observations in field notes. Interviews were conducted on May 25–26, 2026. Each participant took part in one or two sessions, resulting in eight sessions overall, each lasting approximately 60–90 minutes. The interviews addressed participants' understandings of humanistic-religious guidance, its implementation, the children's experiences, reported behavioral and spiritual changes, and the factors facilitating or constraining the program. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Document analysis covered institutional policies, personality and religious guidance materials, records concerning the participating children's development, and visual documentation of institutional activities. The documents were used to contextualize and compare information obtained through interviews and observations. Before data collection, the researchers obtained official permission from the relevant correctional authorities. Interviews were conducted without coercion, and names were replaced with participant codes in the reporting of the findings.

Data were analyzed iteratively following the processes of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification described by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). Initial coding was conducted on interview transcripts, field notes, and institutional documents to identify relevant units of

meaning. Related codes were subsequently grouped into categories concerning relational guidance practices, Islamic spiritual practices, reported changes in spiritual awareness, and implementation conditions. Pattern matching was then used to compare the empirical categories with the person-centered and Islamic concepts employed in the study (Yin 2018). Interpretations were reviewed through source and method triangulation, member checking, an audit trail, and discussions with the research supervisors. Theory guided the interpretation of the categories but was not treated as independent evidence of participants' behavioral or spiritual transformation.

C. Results and Discussion

1. Results

1) Implementation of Humanistic-Religious Guidance

Analysis of the interviews, observations, and institutional documents identified seven interconnected elements in the guidance provided at LPKA Kutoarjo: unconditional acceptance, empathy, congruence, self-reflection, sincere repentance, awareness of divine supervision, and *ihsan*. These elements represent analytical categories derived from the data rather than a formally standardized seven-stage intervention.

The first three elements concerned the relationships between staff members and the participating children. AP explained that staff members were expected to address children by their names rather than by registration numbers or stigmatizing labels. According to AP, using their names helped preserve their sense of identity and fostered more personal communication with staff members (AP, interview, May 2026). Observations also recorded staff members addressing children by name, listening to their concerns, and avoiding insulting language or direct comparisons between children (field observation, 2026). These practices were interpreted as institutional expressions of unconditional positive regard.

MU described empathy as requiring attention to both verbal statements and nonverbal expressions. In MU's account, staff members first listened to and observed a child, considered the experience from the child's perspective, and then communicated their understanding while remaining open to correction (MU, interview, May 2026). This explanation constituted an interview account of the intended counseling process; the available observational data did not document every stage of that process in each interaction.

The data also associated congruence with staff members' willingness to acknowledge their limitations rather than present themselves as having solutions to every problem. AP described responding to difficult questions by saying, "I do not know all the answers either, but we can find them together" (AP, interview, May 2026). AP further explained that staff members attempted to

avoid formulaic advice and to respond sincerely when children discussed their difficulties or progress.

The remaining four elements connected these relational practices with Islamic spiritual guidance. AP described structured self-reflection, or *muhasabah*, through individual conversations, reflective questions, personal journals, letters of apology that did not have to be sent, and the preparation of personal improvement plans (AP, interview, May 2026). According to AP, some reflective sessions were conducted on Friday afternoons and included questions about the circumstances, consequences, and effects of the children's past conduct. Field observations documented reflective and religious activities, but the frequency and sequence of all components were obtained primarily from AP's interview account.

IS described activities intended to cultivate *taubat nasuha* (sincere repentance), *muraqabah* (awareness of being observed by God), and *ihsan* (worship and moral conduct grounded in awareness of God). The reported activities included *Pesantren Kilat*, an intensive Ramadan religious program; *Malam Muhasabah*, or a night of guided self-reflection; *Jumat Taubat*, or Friday repentance activities; congregational *Dhuha* prayers; collective *mujahadah*; daily prayer and *dhikr*; and sermons delivered in rotation by the children after prayer (IS, interview, May 2026). IS also explained that children who could read the Quran fluently were sometimes asked to lead activities under staff supervision. Observations confirmed the children's participation in communal religious activities, while the descriptions of the named programs and their schedules came from the interview and institutional documentation.

Institutional documents and participant accounts connected the guidance program with educational provision. The documents indicated that children were required to participate in the *Kejar Paket A*, *B*, or *C* equivalency programs, corresponding respectively to elementary, junior secondary, and senior secondary education. The documented schedule ran from Monday to Saturday, approximately 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. The institution provided classrooms, reading materials, stationery, uniforms, teachers, and library services without charging the children or their families (institutional document analysis, 2026).

AP and IS identified the digital library as a frequently used supporting medium for accessing and summarizing religious readings and stories concerning repentance and personal change (AP and IS, interviews, May 2026). Participant accounts and institutional documentation indicated that digital media were available in the learning environment (AP and IS, interviews, May 2026; institutional document analysis, 2026). The evidence documents the use of the digital library but does not establish that it was more effective than other instructional media.

2) Participant-Reported Changes in Spiritual Awareness

Staff accounts distinguished between compliance motivated primarily by institutional rules and participation associated with personal reflection and religious commitment. AP and IS interpreted greater involvement in prayer, Quranic reading, reflective activities, and child-led sermons as indications that some children were developing more internally grounded motivations (AP and IS, interviews, May 2026). Because these interpretations came partly from staff members responsible for the program, they were compared with the accounts of the two participating children.

AA associated participation in religious activities with emotional regulation:

“I participate in religious activities because the benefits allow me to be like I am now, instilling values so I can control my emotions” (AA, interview, May 2026).

AA also described a personal worship routine:

“I am usually woken up during the morning prayer to pray, and I pray in my room, then reflect and control my emotions” (AA, interview, May 2026).

These statements indicate that AA connected religious participation with reflection and efforts to regulate emotions. They represent AA’s self-assessment and were not independently measured through a psychological instrument.

AB described regular Quranic learning and participation in scheduled religious activities:

“Every day I study the Koran alone, I read the Quran, and when I study the Koran together, I read the *Iqro*. After prayer, we are scheduled to give a sermon” (AB, interview, May 2026).

AB’s account indicates engagement in both individual and collective religious routines. It also supports the staff’s description of children taking active roles in religious activities. However, the statement does not independently demonstrate a completed transformation in spiritual awareness.

Field observations documented participation in prayer, religious learning, group guidance, and informal interactions. The observations were consistent with the existence of these routines, but they could not directly establish the children’s internal motivations. Accordingly, staff interpreted some participation as movement from externally regulated compliance toward more personally meaningful religious engagement, while the two children described reflection, emotion-regulation efforts, and regular involvement in religious routines. The evidence does not establish an irreversible shift from superficial compliance to authentic spiritual awareness.

3) Supporting and Constraining Factors

Three supporting conditions recurred in the interviews. First, AP and MU emphasized the importance of staff members who could combine religious guidance with empathy, openness, and consistent conduct (AP and MU, interviews, May 2026). Second, IS identified institutional policy and cooperation with the Ministry of Religious Affairs as sources of personnel and program support (IS, interview, May 2026). The institutional documents confirmed the existence of a cooperation agreement concerning character, mental, and spiritual guidance (institutional document analysis, 2026). Third, participants identified educational facilities, reading materials, and the digital library as resources supporting learning and reflection.

The interviews also identified several constraints. AP and MU described differences in the children's educational, religious, and personal backgrounds, as well as shame, withdrawal, and despair during the early period of institutional placement (AP and MU, interviews, May 2026). Some children were reported to have limited reading habits, which affected their engagement with reading-based activities. Staff members also associated limited guidance time with differences in the length of the children's institutional placement. These accounts indicate that children did not participate in or respond to guidance activities in identical ways and that some required additional psychological or educational support.

2. Discussion

The findings show that humanistic-religious guidance at LPKA Kutoarjo operated through the relationship between staff members and children as well as through religious and educational activities. Unconditional acceptance, empathy, and congruence shaped how guidance was delivered, while *muhasabah*, *taubat nasuha*, *muraqabah*, and *ihsan* supplied the moral and spiritual language through which past conduct and future intentions were discussed. This pattern can be interpreted through Rogers's (1957) relational conditions and the broader literature on integrating religion and spirituality within psychotherapy (Captari et al. 2018). The present findings document how this combination was interpreted and practiced in one juvenile correctional institution. They do not, however, establish a standardized model applicable to other institutions.

Relational practices were interpreted as reducing the distance between institutional authority and the children receiving guidance. Addressing children by name, avoiding stigmatizing language, listening to their concerns, and acknowledging the limits of staff knowledge created conditions in which participants could communicate without being defined exclusively by their offenses. Research at LPKA Kutoarjo has previously shown that counseling services remain important but are constrained by personnel, infrastructure, and program coverage (Putri and Subekti 2022). The present case suggests that the

quality of everyday staff-child interaction is another relevant dimension. Because the data came from a small number of participants, the findings support a contextual interpretation of these relationships rather than a general claim that the institution had eliminated stigma or unequal authority.

The spiritual practices described by participants combined religious routines with opportunities for reflection. Journaling, guided questions, letters of apology, prayer, Quranic reading, and child-led sermons linked religious observance with consideration of responsibility and self-correction. This differs from treating participation in worship as sufficient evidence of inner change. Fernando's (2025) study at the same institution similarly connected a Quran-based forgiveness intervention with emotional regulation, although that study examined a specific intervention and cannot serve as direct evidence for the effectiveness of the broader guidance practices examined here. In the present study, AA and AB associated religious participation with emotional control and regular worship, but their accounts capture perceived changes at one point in time. They cannot demonstrate that every participating child experienced the same process or that the reported changes were permanent. The staff's interpretation of movement from rule-based compliance toward more personally endorsed participation is broadly compatible with the distinction between controlled and autonomous motivation (Ryan and Deci 2000). In this case, however, the two interviews and cross-sectional design do not establish that religious practices had been fully internalized.

Equivalency education and the digital library formed a complementary institutional setting for guidance. The *Kejar Paket* programs maintained access to education, while reading and summarizing digital materials provided a structured activity through which children engaged with religious and moral narratives. Previous research at LPKA Kutoarjo has examined education as a right and documented the institutional procedures and constraints involved in providing it (Wulan and Sasmita 2022). The present data indicate that educational provision and religious guidance occurred within the same institutional environment. They do not demonstrate that the digital library independently produced spiritual transformation or restored self-confidence, because neither outcome was measured against another instructional medium.

The supporting and constraining factors further indicate that the approach depended on institutional capacity rather than religious content alone. Empathetic staff members, policy support, interinstitutional cooperation, and educational facilities enabled the reported practices. Conversely, different periods of placement, varied educational and religious backgrounds, limited reading experience, shame, and despair affected participation. Studies of stress and negative self-concept among children in conflict with the law provide relevant context for these psychological constraints (Amikola et al. 2024;

Situmorang 2025), although they do not directly verify the psychological condition of participants in this case. The findings therefore support guidance that is responsive to individual circumstances rather than assuming that a uniform sequence will produce the same outcome for every child. Research on juvenile reentry and family involvement further indicates that post-release support extends beyond correctional institutions, although evidence for specific aftercare models remains limited (Abrams et al. 2014; Donato 2025). These studies provide a rationale for follow-up research; they do not show that the present participants received or benefited from comparable aftercare.

D. Conclusion

Humanistic-religious guidance at LPKA Kutoarjo combined person-centered relationships, Islamic spiritual practices, and educational activities. Analysis of the data identified seven interconnected elements: unconditional acceptance, empathy, congruence, *muhasabah*, *taubat nasuha*, *muraqabah*, and *ihsan*. These elements were expressed through everyday staff-child interactions, guided reflection, communal and individual worship, child-led religious activities, equivalency education, and digital-library use. They represent analytical categories derived from this case rather than a standardized intervention model.

Staff accounts interpreted some participation as more personally engaged, while observations and the two children's interviews documented involvement in reflection and religious routines. AA associated religious participation with emotional regulation, while AB described regular Quranic learning and participation in scheduled sermons. Staff interpreted these patterns as movement from externally regulated participation toward more personally meaningful engagement; however, the children's accounts do not independently establish a change in underlying motivation or its permanence. Implementation was supported by empathetic staff members, institutional cooperation, and educational resources. It was constrained by differences in the children's backgrounds, limited periods of placement, reading difficulties, and psychological conditions such as shame, withdrawal, and despair.

The study contributes a case-specific account of how relational, religious, and educational practices were combined within one Indonesian juvenile correctional institution. Its findings are limited by the single research site, the involvement of only five participants, the short observation period, restricted access to institutional documents, possible socially desirable responses, and the absence of a comparison group or post-release data. Consequently, the study cannot determine intervention effectiveness, sustained spiritual transformation, or effects on recidivism. Longitudinal research involving children, institutional

staff, families, and communities after release would be required to examine whether the reported changes continue beyond the institutional setting.

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