

# The Importance of Religious Counselors in Building Moderate Attitudes in Moderate Villages

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## ABSTRACT

**Background.** Implementing religious moderation in villages is crucial for fostering an understanding of harmonious and non-extreme attitudes within society. This approach helps to maintain social cohesion and prevent conflicts that may arise from radical or extremist views.

**Purpose.** The main goal of this research is to highlight the importance of religious educators in promoting and implementing the values of religious moderation in village communities. By focusing on moderate Islam, the study aims to integrate these values into everyday life through various religious and community activities.

**Method.** This research employs a combination of primary and secondary data. Primary data is collected through interviews with key individuals involved in promoting religious moderation, such as religious educators and community leaders. Secondary data includes documentation and observations conducted during field studies.

**Results.** The study reveals that the values of religious moderation are essential for creating peaceful and balanced community life. Religious instructors play a pivotal role in this process, acting as both leaders and coaches in fostering a moderate Islamic perspective. The research shows that incorporating religious moderation into daily village activities helps to strengthen the community's understanding of these values, reducing the likelihood of extremist behaviors and enhancing social harmony.

**Conclusion.** The findings underscore the importance of religious educators in embedding the principles of religious moderation within village communities. By leveraging their influence and organizing various religious and community events, these educators effectively promote a moderate approach to Islam, contributing to a harmonious and stable society.

## KEYWORDS

Harmonization , Religious Expansion, Religious Moderation.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the midst of the development of the times and increasingly complex challenges in society, the need to build a moderate attitude is very important (Azhar, 2018). Religious extension workers have a very important role in building a moderate attitude in the village (Rozak et al., 2020). This is because religious extension workers have in-depth knowledge and experience about religious teachings and are able to guide the community in implementing religious teachings in a moderate and tolerant manner (Azhar, 2018).

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**Citation:** Ghandi, Ghandi. (2024). The Importance of Religious Counselors in Building Moderate Attitudes in Moderate Villages. *Journal of Multidisciplinary Sustainability Asean*, 1(2), 73–79.

<https://doi.org/10.70177/ijmsa.v1i2.1083>

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**Received:** June 19, 2024

**Accepted:** July 21, 2024

**Published:** September 3, 2024



Human civilization today is colored by conflict, disharmony, and radicalization that often threaten the integrity and peace of society. This challenge can be faced by developing a moderate attitude in religion, which involves a proper understanding and harmony between religious beliefs and universal human values. Therefore, the role of religious extension workers in building a moderate attitude in the village is very crucial because they function as a mediator between religion and the community in bridging the correct understanding of religion with moderate practice.

Religious extension workers are inseparable from their responsibilities as facilitators who help the community in understanding moderate religious principles, overcoming narrow understandings and encouraging tolerance among fellow religious believers. In Moderation Village, there are various activities carried out by religious extension workers, such as religious lectures, teaching in religious groups, providing advice and counseling, and organizing religious activities that prioritize the values of togetherness, peace, and tolerance.

The Ministry of Religion in this case has collaborated with the village government in placing religious extension workers in each village as an effort to build a moderate attitude in the community. Therefore, this study aims to explore and analyze the importance of the role of religious extension workers in building moderate attitudes in villages. Various sources show that the importance of the role of religious extension workers in building a moderate attitude in the village can be felt and reflected in several aspects. First, religious extension workers have in-depth knowledge of religious teachings and experience in applying religious teachings in a moderate manner. They are able to study and interpret the holy texts wisely, so that they can convey more inclusive religious messages and invite an attitude of love, tolerance, and justice to all religious people. In addition, religious extension workers also have good communication skills and can interact with the community effectively. They are able to listen and understand the needs and concerns of the community, so that they can provide relevant views and advice according to the local context. Second, religious extension workers also act as mediators between religion and society in bridging the understanding of moderate religion.

There are several studies conducted by Susanti and Syahrída, they mention that religious extension workers play an important role in promoting moderate attitudes in society (Febriansah et al., 2022). Furthermore, research from Robbins and Wilner also emphasizes the importance of the role of religious extension workers in helping individuals deal with conflict and radicalization and developing moderate attitudes (Azhar, 2018). The study conducted by Misrawati and Harfiah also highlighted the importance of the role of religious extension workers in building tolerance between religious communities in moderation villages. In line with the results of other studies, it was found that religious extension workers have a significant influence in forming moderate attitudes because they can provide a balanced understanding of religion and avoid extreme interpretation. In addition, religious extension workers also have wide access and direct contact with the village community.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach to gain a deep understanding of the implementation of religious moderation in rural communities. Primary data was collected through in-depth interviews with religious extension workers who played the role of the main actors in teaching the values of religious moderation. This interview was conducted with the aim of exploring the experiences, views, and strategies used by religious extension workers in inviting village communities to apply a moderate attitude. In addition, interviews were also conducted with members of the village community who were the target of counseling to understand their acceptance of the values of religious moderation and the changes in attitudes that occurred as a result of counseling.

Secondary data was obtained through several techniques, namely direct observation, documentation, and literature studies. Direct observation is carried out by being involved in religious and social activities held in the village where the research is located. This aims to observe firsthand how the values of religious moderation are applied in daily life by village communities. Documentation includes the collection of written data such as activity reports, counseling materials, and other notes relevant to religious moderation activities. The literature study was conducted by reviewing the literature related to religious understanding and moderate attitudes in the context of village communities, including relevant previous studies.

Data analysis was carried out using thematic analysis techniques, where data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation were processed to find the main themes related to the implementation of religious moderation. This process involves steps such as transcribing interviews, encoding data, and identifying themes. The data that has been analyzed are then presented in a descriptive form to provide a clear picture of how religious moderation is applied and accepted in rural communities.

The qualitative approach in this study allows researchers to gain in-depth insights into the social and religious dynamics that exist in villages, as well as how interactions between religious extension workers and the community can affect moderate understanding and attitudes.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Religious harmonization in society

Religious harmonization is an important pillar in maintaining social life and peace at the local level, especially in villages that have religious diversity (Rozak et al., 2020). Based on various existing sources, the harmonization of religion in the village has many benefits and is important to be studied and understood. One of the important benefits of maintaining religious harmony in the village is to create peace and harmony between residents in religion.

The main goal of maintaining religious harmony in the village is to prevent conflicts between religions. This is important because conflicts between religions can cause riots, social tensions, and disruption of people's welfare. In addition, by maintaining religious harmony in the village, the community can respect and respect each other's religious differences (Azhar, 2018). This will strengthen social ties between villagers and encourage good cooperation in various aspects of life, such as education, economy, and culture (Rozak et al., 2020).

One of the strategies that can be applied to maintain religious harmony in the village is through inclusive religious education and interfaith dialogue (Anwar, 2021). Inclusive religious education can provide a broader understanding of the religions in the village and teach the values of tolerance, mutual respect, and harmony between religious communities (Rozak et al., 2020). In the context of interfaith dialogue, there needs to be an effort to facilitate discussions and meetings between religious leaders, community leaders, and villagers representing various religions. So that in this case, religious extension workers and community leaders have an important role in facilitating interfaith dialogue. In addition, it is also important to create an inclusive public space for all religions in the village. This can be done by establishing a religious center that is inclusive and open to all religious people, as well as holding events or activities that involve all religious communities in the village.

In addition, it is also important to create an effective and fair conflict resolution mechanism in the village. These mechanisms may involve conflict resolution through mediation, customary courts, or other independent and neutral conflict resolution institutions. Such as religious extension workers and community leaders who can act as mediators in resolving interreligious conflicts by

internalizing religious moderation as a way to resolve differences and increase interreligious harmonization (Anwar, 2021).

In a diverse village environment, a moderate attitude is an important key in maintaining harmony and harmony between residents (Biemans, 2023). A moderate attitude is an attitude that respects diversity, is not extreme in views, and is able to listen to opinions and views from various parties (Rozak et al., 2020). To reinforce moderation in diverse village environments, there are several steps that can be taken to achieve this goal:

**Building** open and inclusive dialogue and communication is one of the important steps in strengthening moderate attitudes in the village environment. Through dialogue and open communication, each individual can understand and respect each other's differences of views and opinions.

**Encouraging** the active participation of all villagers in decision-making is also an important factor in strengthening moderate attitudes in the village environment. By involving all villagers in the decision-making process, every opinion and perspective will be taken into account fairly and proportionately.

**The implementation of** educational programs on tolerance and harmony between religious communities can also help strengthen moderate attitudes in the village environment. Through this educational program, villagers will better understand the importance of respecting and accepting differences.

From some of the steps above, it is interpreted that a moderate attitude can grow and develop in diverse villages. With open dialogue and communication, each individual can understand and respect each other's differences in views and opinions, therefore extreme attitudes can be minimized and harmony will be maintained (Tohari, 2024). In addition, the active participation of all villagers in decision-making is also an important factor in strengthening a moderate attitude

Therefore, religious extension workers and community leaders in the village need to continue to build communication and good relations with multi-religious communities (Azhar, 2018). By maintaining open communication and prioritizing constructive dialogue, religious extension workers and community leaders can build trust and understanding that respects each other among religious communities (Rozak et al., 2020).

### **The Role of Religious Extension Workers in Moderation Villages**

Religious extension workers have a role in building a moderate attitude in moderation villages (Azhar, 2018). They act as facilitators in communicating moderate religious understanding to the village community (Hadita et al., 2023). In the lives of village communities, religious extension workers also have a very important role as social actors (Ginting et al., 2020). In carrying out their duties, religious extension workers in villages are responsible for providing religious guidance to the community (Iryani et al., 2021). They play a role in spreading religious teachings, guiding and advising the community on how to carry out worship, and strengthening religious values. In addition, as social actors in the village, religious extension workers also have the responsibility to promote harmony between religious communities and strengthen social ties among villagers. Through activities such as religious discussions, recitations, or religious harmony training, religious extension workers are able to create a harmonious and tolerant environment in the village. In addition, religious extension workers can also be mediators in resolving conflicts between villagers of different religions.

Through interviews conducted, it was found that religious extension workers have the ability to communicate well with village communities and convey religious messages in accordance with

the local context (Azhar, 2018). In addition, religious extension workers are also able to interpret and explain religious teachings in a way that can be easily understood by the village community. In the context of building a moderate attitude, religious extension workers have an important role in avoiding extreme interpretations and promoting a balanced understanding of religion (Hadita et al., 2023).

In addition, religious extension workers also have wide access and direct contact with the village community (Azhar, 2018). Through this access and contact, they can understand the challenges and problems faced by the village community directly (Hadita et al., 2023). In the interviews conducted, several religious extension workers revealed that they are often a place to vent or consult personal problems faced by the village community (Azhar, 2018).

*"The community often gives complaints and if it is felt that there is a social gap, then as a religious extension officer will call both parties to be resolved in a family manner"*

Religious extension workers are also mediators in resolving conflicts and disputes in rural communities (Siswanto et al., 2020). In many cases, religious extension workers play a role in easing tensions and improving existing understanding of tolerance and harmony between religious communities (Hadita et al., 2023).

*"In the village, when there is a deliberation, of course, we will invite community leaders and religious extension workers to be used as coaches in the aspect of religious understanding"*

Interviews by researchers show that religious extension workers are often asked to help resolve conflicts that occur in villages, both between religious people and with other parties such as the government or companies in the area (Azhar, 2018). In the context of building a moderate attitude in moderation villages, the role of religious extension workers is very important (Hadita et al., 2023). Religious extension workers have adequate knowledge and expertise in providing an understanding of moderate religion to village communities (Siswanto et al., 2020). In addition, they also have a strong connection with the village community and can understand the local context better, so they can communicate religious messages in a way that is relevant and easy for the village community to understand (Azhar, 2018).

*"In certain aspects, a religious extension worker also practices how to live in harmony with fellow neighbors in the community with various activities carried out such as mutual cooperation or holding religious activities that are oriented towards understanding moderate attitudes"*

There are several activities carried out by religious extension workers in building a moderate attitude in moderation villages. Such as organizing religious lectures that provide an understanding of moderate religious teachings and avoid extreme interpretations. In addition, religious extension workers can also hold open discussions with village communities to discuss sensitive religious issues and promote harmony between religious communities (Febriansah et al., 2022).

Another activity carried out by religious extension workers is holding training or workshops on tolerance and harmony between religious communities. In this training, religious extension workers can provide knowledge about various religions and beliefs in the village, as well as teach the values of mutual respect and cooperation in religious life

The existence of religious extension workers in villages is also the government's effort to maintain social stability and build social resilience at the village community level. In this context, religious extension workers have an important role in helping to overcome various social problems that exist in the village, such as poverty, domestic violence, or psychiatric problems. Through



religious counseling, village communities can be given an understanding of the importance of tolerance between religious communities in building a harmonious and peaceful life. and can avoid social conflicts that can threaten the stability of the village. In addition, religious extension workers also have a role in providing an understanding of moral and ethical values to the community in order to create a high awareness of the importance of integrity, honesty, and responsibility in community life.

Religious extension workers can also be a source of inspiration and motivation for village people to develop themselves personally and achieve their best potential. By providing advice and encouragement to rural communities, religious extension workers can help develop their quality of life and improve their well-being. In addition, religious extension workers can also help increase the knowledge and understanding of village communities on religious and moral issues that are relevant to daily life. In this case, religious extension workers can also provide information and learning that can help village communities in facing various challenges or dilemmas in their lives. The existence of religious extension workers in the village also has a positive impact on local economic development. By providing guidance and assistance to members of the village community, religious extension workers can help increase the understanding of village communities about the importance of trying and working hard to achieve the welfare of economists.

From some of the things above, religious extension workers as social actors who must be in the village have a very important social responsibility. They act as mediators between individuals in the village community and religion, and help overcome various social problems in the village. Religious extension workers also have village community development activities through religious education that can help increase spirituality and strengthen religious values in daily life.

## CONCLUSION

In the context of building a moderate attitude in moderation villages, the role of religious extension workers is very important. Religious extension workers can help ease conflicts and disputes among village communities by providing an accurate understanding of moderate religious teachings and encouraging harmony between religious communities in daily life. In addition, they can also hold religious lectures, open discussions, and trainings aimed at building a broader understanding of tolerance and harmony between religious communities. With the active and effective role of religious extension workers, moderation villages can become a more harmonious and fair environment for all people, nourish religious harmony and improve the quality of life and welfare of the community as a whole.

## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

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