

Leaders' Self-Disclosure and Teachers' Psychological Well-Being in an Islamic Boarding School

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received July 16, 2026

Revised August 30, 2026

Accepted September 2, 2026

Keywords: Interpersonal Communication; Leader Self-Disclosure; Intentionality; Psychological Well-Being; Islamic Boarding School

ABSTRACT

Teachers in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) carry multiple educational, supervisory, and institutional duties that may affect their psychological well-being, yet how far leaders' self-disclosure contributes to it in this hierarchical-religious setting remains unclear. This study examined the relationship between a kiai's self-disclosure in interpersonal communication and teachers' psychological well-being at the Salafiyah Al-Jawahir Islamic Boarding School, Soreang, Bandung Regency. Using a quantitative correlational design, data were collected from 56 of the pesantren's 65 teachers through simple random sampling (Slovin formula, 5% margin of error) and analyzed with Spearman Rank correlation after the instruments were confirmed valid and reliable. Overall, the kiai's self-disclosure was positively but not significantly related to teachers' psychological well-being ($\rho = 0.258$, $p = 0.055$). Among its five dimensions, only intentionality of disclosure was significantly related to well-being ($\rho = 0.266$, $p = 0.048$); amount, depth, valence, and honesty of disclosure were not statistically significant, though valence and honesty approached the threshold. These findings suggest that in a hierarchical-religious leadership context, the deliberateness behind a leader's self-disclosure matters more for teachers' well-being than how much, how deep, how positive, or how honest that disclosure is.

1. INTRODUCTION

Interpersonal communication is a fundamental process in organizational life because it is through interactions among interdependent individuals that meaning, relational closeness, and individual psychological experiences are formed. Effective interpersonal relationships are determined not only by the formal exchange of information but also by individuals' ability to build closeness through personal interactions (DeVito, 2016). Through Social Penetration Theory, explain that interpersonal relationships develop from superficial interactions toward psychological depth through a process of gradual self-disclosure (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). Rimé (2023) views self-disclosure as a process in which individuals consciously reveal personal information to others, including thoughts, feelings, experiences, and other aspects of their personal lives. Wheelless (1976) operationalized self-disclosure into the dimensions of amount, depth, valence, honesty/accuracy, and intent. Conditions conducive to self-disclosure are not always easily achieved within hierarchical relationship structures, such as in Salafiyah Islamic boarding schools where the kiai serves as a respected figure of moral and spiritual authority (Rouf, 2016). Several empirical studies have demonstrated that leaders' interpersonal communication is linked to teachers' psychological well-being. Berkovich & Eyal (2018) found that leaders' capacity for empathy in communication is associated with positive emotional changes in teachers. Hascher and Waber (2021), through a systematic review of 98 studies, confirmed that the quality of interpersonal relationships is a primary predictor of teacher well-being. In the context of Islamic boarding schools

(pesantren), Agustin, Chatra, & Miko (2025) found that communication by boarding school leaders plays a major role in improving teachers' motivation and performance.

The Salafiyah Al-Jawahir Islamic Boarding School in Soreang, Bandung Regency, is an institution founded in 2003 on the initiative of KH. Mamat Saeful Qodir, M.Si. This boarding school combines the Salafiyah and Khalafiyah systems, setting it apart from both purely Salafiyah and modern boarding schools. Its leadership has been described as charismatic yet consultative, with decisions typically reached through musyawarah (deliberation) with the teaching council even though final authority remains with the kiai (Amarullah et al., 2020). The boarding school's leader is also known for his active participation in social and religious activities organized by the local government, as well as for regularly holding weekly and monthly communication forums with teachers. Preliminary interviews with five teachers revealed that the kiai is perceived as an open-minded figure who engages in personal and in-depth conversations and leaves a positive impression at every meeting. Pesantren teachers face a far more complex set of roles compared to public school teachers: teaching classical texts and providing formal education, supervising students 24 hours a day, managing communication with parents, and carrying out institutional duties. The complexity of these roles can affect their psychological well-being. Ryff (1989) defines psychological well-being not merely as the absence of mental disorders, but as encompassing six dimensions: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, purpose in life, environmental mastery, and personal growth. Empirical studies specifically linking the kiai's self-disclosure to teachers' psychological well-being in the pesantren context remain very limited. Empirical studies examining the relationship between leaders' self-disclosure and teachers' psychological well-being in Islamic boarding schools remain limited; recent studies on pesantren teachers have instead focused on professional identity, commitment, and well-being in relation to cultural and workload factors more broadly, without directly testing leaders' self-disclosure as a predictor (Khaira et al., 2025; Rasyidin et al., 2025). Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by examining the relationship between leaders' self-disclosure in interpersonal communication and teachers' psychological well-being at the Salafiyah Al-Jawahir Islamic Boarding School in Soreang, Bandung Regency. The findings are expected to contribute to a better understanding of how leaders' interpersonal communication influences teachers' psychological well-being within the unique cultural and organizational environment of Islamic boarding schools.

This study's novelty lies in two respects. First, it is conducted at a pesantren that combines the Salafiyah and Khalafiyah systems, a setting in which the kiai functions simultaneously as spiritual authority and formal-education coordinator, and where research on leaders' self-disclosure remains scarce. Second, rather than assuming that Western self-disclosure theory transfers uniformly across relational contexts, this study tests whether Social Penetration Theory and Jourard's self-disclosure framework, both developed primarily from relatively equal and voluntary relationships, hold within a hierarchical-religious leadership relationship shaped by ta'dzim, the cultural norm of deference toward a respected authority. Based on the theoretical framework and previous empirical findings, this study hypothesizes that leaders' self-disclosure in interpersonal communication is significantly associated with teachers' psychological well-being at the Salafiyah Al-Jawahir Islamic Boarding School. Furthermore, each dimension of leaders' self-disclosure, namely the amount of disclosure, depth of information, message valence, honesty, and intentionality, is hypothesized to have a significant relationship with teachers' psychological well-being. Accordingly, this study examines both the overall relationship between leaders' self-disclosure and teachers' psychological well-being and the individual relationships between each self-disclosure dimension and teachers' psychological well-being.

2. METHODS

This study employs a quantitative approach using explanatory research methods and a correlational design. This approach was chosen because the study aims to explain the relationships between variables through hypothesis testing using standardized instruments whose results are statistically valid (Sugiyono, 2013). The study population consists of all 65 teachers at the Salafiyah Al-Jawahir Islamic Boarding School who are involved in all boarding school activities, academic, boarding school-related, and student care. The sample was determined using probability sampling with a simple random sampling technique, in which every member of the population had an equal chance of being selected regardless of particular characteristics; applying the Slovin formula with a 5% margin of error yielded a sample of 56 teachers, who were then drawn at random from the population list. The research instrument consisted of a closed-ended questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Variable X (the kiai's self-disclosure) was operationalized based on Jourard (1971) theory, using Wheelless (1976) instrument, which was divided into subvariables, totaling 16 items. Variable Y (teachers' psychological well-being) was measured using the 18-item version of Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scales (RPWB), which covers six psychological dimensions (Ryff et al., 2018). Validity testing was conducted using Pearson's Product-Moment correlation (p-value criterion < 0.05). Of the total 34 items, 33 were deemed valid (1 item in variable Y was excluded). Reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha yielded a value of $\alpha = 0.870$ for variable X (good reliability) and $\alpha = 0.797$ for variable Y (adequate reliability), both exceeding the 0.70 threshold.

Because the research instrument used a five-point Likert scale, which yields ordinal-level data, hypothesis testing was conducted using Spearman Rank correlation (Spearman's rho), a nonparametric technique for measuring the strength and direction of association between two ordinally scaled variables (Sugiyono, 2013). Spearman Rank was chosen instead of a parametric correlation because it does not require the assumption of a normally distributed interval-level population, making it more appropriate for Likert-scale survey data of this kind. Decisions on each hypothesis were based on the two-tailed significance value (p) at $\alpha = 0.05$: H_0 was not rejected when $p \geq 0.05$, and rejected when $p < 0.05$. The interpretation of correlation strength followed Sugiyono's (2013) classification: 0.00–0.199 (very weak), 0.20–0.399 (weak), 0.40–0.599 (moderate), 0.60–0.799 (strong), and 0.80–1.00 (very strong). All data processing was performed using SPSS version 29.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

Descriptive analysis showed that the total score for the kiai's self-disclosure (X) averaged 65.20 of a theoretical maximum of 80 (81.5%), with 75.0% of respondents in the high category and none in the low category, using Azwar's (2012) ideal-score interval procedure for categorizing respondents as low, moderate, or high; the total score for teachers' psychological well-being (Y) averaged 62.30 of a theoretical maximum of 85 (73.3%), with 55.4% of respondents in the high category. Hypothesis testing was then conducted using Spearman Rank correlation for the overall relationship and for each of the five self-disclosure dimensions. Table 1 presents a summary of the correlation test results.

Table 1. Results of the Spearman Rank Correlation Test

Variable Relationship	Spearman's rho	Sig. (2-tailed)	Strength	Decision
X Total → Y	0.258	0.055	Weak	Not significant
X1 (Amount of Disclosure) → Y	0.117	0.392	Very weak	Not significant

Variable Relationship	Spearman's rho	Sig. (2-tailed)	Strength	Decision
X2 (Depth of Information) → Y	0.164	0.228	Very weak	Not significant
X3 (Message Valence) → Y	0.254	0.059	Weak	Not significant
X4 (Honesty) → Y	0.261	0.052	Weak	Not significant
X5 (Intentionality) → Y*	0.266	0.048	Weak	Significant (p < .05)

* Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). Strength categories follow Sugiyono (2013). Source: SPSS version 29 data analysis results, 2026.

Overall, the kiai's self-disclosure was positively but not significantly related to teachers' psychological well-being ($\rho = 0.258$; sig. = 0.055), a value just above the 0.05 threshold. Among the five dimensions, only intentionality of disclosure (X5) reached statistical significance ($\rho = 0.266$; sig. = 0.048; $p < 0.05$); the amount (X1), depth (X2), valence (X3), and honesty (X4) of disclosure were not statistically significant, although valence and honesty approached the threshold (sig. = 0.059 and 0.052, respectively). Because the overall relationship was not significant, the shared variance implied by ρ^2 (approximately 6.7%) is reported only descriptively and should not be read as evidence of a meaningful predictive relationship.

DISCUSSION

The Relationship Between the Number of Disclosures and Teachers' Psychological Well-Being

The amount of self-disclosure (X1) showed the weakest relationship among all subvariables ($\rho = 0.117$; sig. = 0.392), well short of statistical significance. This runs counter to Jourard's (1971) premise that frequent self-disclosure signals a willingness to build relational closeness. Notably, X1 had one of the largest score variations among the five dimensions ($SD = 3.29$) yet still produced the lowest correlation, indicating that the weak relationship is not an artifact of limited variance but a genuine absence of association: how often the kiai talks about himself simply does not track how psychologically well teachers report feeling. This pattern is consistent with the distinction Altman and Taylor (1973) draw between breadth and depth of disclosure, in which sheer quantity of disclosure is not, by itself, what drives relational closeness. It is also consistent with the cultural norm of ta'dzim that structures the kiai-guru relationship at Salafiyah Al-Jawahir: teachers do not need the kiai to talk extensively about himself to feel supported, and excessive disclosure from a figure of moral and spiritual authority could even blur the boundary of propriety that helps sustain his standing as a role model (uswah hasanah). (Syachotin & Atho'illah, 2020).

The Relationship Between Information Depth and Teachers' Psychological Well-Being

The depth of information dimension (X2) also showed a weak, non-significant relationship with teachers' psychological well-being ($\rho = 0.164$; sig. = 0.228), despite 82.1% of respondents rating this dimension highly. The concentration of scores at the high end of the scale left little variance for a correlation to be detected, but the direction of the finding is nonetheless informative: guru appear to attribute depth to the kiai's disclosures based on a broadly shared perception of him as an open, wise figure, rather than from differentiated personal experience with him, so this collectively held impression does not translate into individually varying levels of psychological well-being. Within pesantren culture, closeness to the kiai is understood less through Altman and Taylor's (1973) "onion" model of progressively deeper self-disclosure and more through uswah hasanah (moral example) and spiritual guidance; teachers do not require the kiai to "peel back" his most personal layers to feel that the relationship is meaningful, which helps explain why depth of disclosure, though perceived positively, is unrelated to their psychological well-being in this setting. (Dhofier, 1982).

The Relationship Between Message Valence and Teachers' Psychological Well-Being

The message valence dimension (X3), referring to the tendency of the kiai's disclosures to be positive rather than negative, was not statistically significant but came close to the 0.05 threshold ($\rho = 0.254$; $\text{sig.} = 0.059$). Together with honesty, it recorded the smallest gap from significance among the four non-significant dimensions, which invites a cautious rather than dismissive reading: a real but modest association may exist but was not detected with sufficient power at this sample size ($n = 56$). This near-significant, positive pattern is broadly consistent with Berkovich and Eyal (2018), who found that principals' empowering, positively framed communication is associated with more positive teacher emotion.

The Relationship Between Honesty and Teachers' Psychological Well-Being

The honesty dimension (X4) produced the correlation closest to statistical significance among the four non-significant dimensions ($\rho = 0.261$; $\text{sig.} = 0.052$), missing the 0.05 threshold by only 0.002. As with valence, this suggests a possible relationship that the present sample was underpowered to confirm rather than a genuine absence of association. Substantively, guru appear to receive the kiai's pronouncements as trustworthy guidance from a recognized moral authority almost by default, which may compress the variance needed for honesty, specifically, to distinguish itself as a predictor of well-being, even though the direction and near-significance of the finding keep it relevant for pesantren leaders to sustain.

The Relationship Between Intentional Disclosure and Teachers' Psychological Well-Being

The intentionality of disclosure dimension (X5) was the only subvariable to show a statistically significant relationship with teachers' psychological well-being ($\rho = 0.266$; $\text{sig.} = 0.048$; $p < 0.05$), a weak but genuine positive association. This dimension measures the extent to which guru perceive the kiai's self-disclosure as deliberate and purposeful rather than incidental. Its significance, set against the non-significance of amount, depth, valence, and honesty, indicates that what matters for teachers' well-being is not how much, how deeply, how positively, or how honestly the kiai discloses himself, but whether that disclosure is consciously intended. This finding is consistent with Wheelless and Grotz (1977), who linked interpersonal trust to disclosure that is consciously and deliberately made, and with Gruzd and Hernández-García (2018), who found that awareness and intentionality in self-disclosure tend to strengthen, rather than weaken, when a person is communicating with someone of higher relative power. Read through Social Penetration Theory, a deliberate act of self-disclosure by a highly respected authority figure such as a kiai can be understood as a form of recognition extended toward teachers, a signal that their presence and role are valued, which plausibly explains why this single dimension, and none of the others, registers as significant.

The Relationship Between Kiai's Overall Self-Disclosure and Teachers' Psychological Well-Being

Overall, the results of the main hypothesis test show that the kiai's self-disclosure in interpersonal communication (X total) is positively but not significantly related to teachers' psychological well-being (Y), with $\rho = 0.258$ ($\text{sig.} = 0.055$), a value only marginally above the 0.05 threshold. This result departs from the largely straightforward, positive premise underlying Social Penetration Theory and Jourard's (1971) self-disclosure framework, in which a leader's greater openness is expected to translate fairly directly into a follower's greater relational closeness and well-being. This departure can be understood through the asymmetry of the kiai-guru relationship. Social Penetration Theory and self-disclosure theory were developed chiefly from relationships characterized by relative equality and voluntary reciprocity, in which each party is comparably free

to disclose and to reciprocate disclosure, the dyadic effect that Jourard (1971) treats as the main psychological payoff of self-disclosure. At Salafiyah Al-Jawahir, however, the relationship operates within a hierarchical-religious structure governed by ta'dzim, a norm of deference toward a figure recognized for religious and moral authority (Dhofier, 1982; Syaehotin & Atho'illah, 2020): guru are not expected, and may not feel able, to reciprocate the kiai's openness on equal terms. Without that reciprocal channel, the mechanism through which disclosure is theorized to translate into well-being is structurally constrained, which is consistent with teachers reporting comparatively high well-being (55.4% in the high category) largely independent of how open the kiai is. Guru in this setting appear to draw psychological security less from the kiai's personal transparency than from khidmah, an ethic of devotional service in which working for and under the kiai already carries spiritual meaning regardless of how much of himself he personally discloses (Syihabuddin et al., 2023). Taken together, these findings suggest a cultural boundary of Social Penetration Theory: its predictive strength depends on the degree of equality and reciprocity a relationship allows, conditions only partly present in a kiai-guru relationship.

Comparison with Prior Studies. These findings diverge from Palentina, Istiana, and Wahyuni (2025), who reported a significant positive relationship between self-disclosure and psychological well-being among university students maintaining second Instagram accounts. That divergence is plausibly explained by relational context: Palentina et al. (2025) examined self-disclosure between comparatively equal peers in a voluntary, digitally mediated setting, whereas this study examines a hierarchical, face-to-face relationship between a religious authority and his subordinates. The present findings align more closely with Tian (2023), who found that a leader's self-disclosure does not directly predict follower outcomes but works indirectly through interpersonal attraction, and with the near-significant results for valence and honesty, which echo Berkovich and Eyal (2018) on the emotional benefit of positively framed leader communication, without reaching the same threshold of significance found in organizational, non-religious settings.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this study extends Social Penetration Theory and self-disclosure theory by proposing a cultural boundary condition: their predictive power over relational closeness and well-being weakens as a relationship departs from the equality and reciprocity these theories assume, as in a hierarchical-religious kiai-guru relationship bound by ta'dzim and khidmah. It also refines Wheelless's (1976) five-dimension model of self-disclosure by showing that, in such relationships, intentionality carries more predictive weight than amount, depth, valence, or honesty. Practically, kiai and other leaders of faith-based educational institutions do not need to disclose extensively or deeply to support teachers' psychological well-being; over-sharing personal information is not what this study's data support. What is more consequential is planning deliberate, purposeful moments of personal communication, such as scheduled personal dialogue or explicitly stating the intent behind a shared experience, rather than relying on the frequency or depth of disclosure alone. For internal organizational communication in religious institutions more broadly, this suggests that a leader's openness is most effective for staff well-being when it is deliberately signalled as intentional care, not merely delivered as personal information.

4. CONCLUSION

This study found that the kiai's self-disclosure in interpersonal communication was not significantly related to teachers' psychological well-being at Pondok Pesantren Salafiyah Al-Jawahir ($\rho = 0.258$, $p = 0.055$), a result that departs from the largely positive, reciprocity-based premise of Social Penetration Theory and Western self-disclosure literature. Of its five dimensions, only intentionality of disclosure, whether the kiai's openness was perceived as conscious and purposeful, was significantly related to teachers' well-being ($\rho = 0.266$, $p = 0.048$); the amount, depth, valence,

and honesty of disclosure did not reach significance, though valence and honesty came close. The main contribution of this study is theoretical: it identifies a cultural boundary of Social Penetration Theory and Jourard's self-disclosure framework when applied to a hierarchical-religious leadership relationship shaped by ta'dzim (deference) and khidmah (devotional service), in which closeness and well-being are governed less by how much a leader discloses than by whether that disclosure is deliberate.

Practically, the findings suggest that pesantren and other faith-based educational leaders need not disclose extensively to support teachers' well-being; they are better served by planning deliberate, purposeful moments of personal communication than by increasing the frequency or depth of self-disclosure alone. This study is limited by its focus on a single Islamic boarding school and its cross-sectional correlational design, which restricts the generalizability of the findings and precludes causal claims. The sample size (56 of 65 teachers) also limits statistical power, as reflected in the near-significant results for valence and honesty, which may reflect real but modest associations that a larger sample could confirm. Future research is encouraged to involve a larger and more diverse sample across multiple pesantren, employ longitudinal or mixed-methods designs capable of probing how teachers interpret the kiai's intentionality in practice, and examine additional variables such as organizational climate, leadership style, workload, and spirituality that may jointly shape teachers' psychological well-being.

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