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Association Between Clothing Type and Observed Behavior among Boys During Mosque Worship in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study examined the association between clothing type and observed behavior among Muslim boys attending mosque worship during Ramadan in Indonesia.

Methods and Materials: A naturalistic observational study was conducted across eight semi-urban Indonesian mosques during ten consecutive Ramadan days. A total of 1,391 child-presence episodes involving boys approximately 6–9 years old were recorded. Clothing was classified as religious or casual, and predominant behavior as calm or disruptive. Associations were examined using Pearson's chi-square test, Cramér's V, and the contingency coefficient. Two parent interviews provided contextual information.

Findings: Calm behavior was observed in 409 of 630 episodes (64.9%) involving religious clothing, compared with 198 of 761 episodes (26.0%) involving casual clothing. Conversely, disruptive behavior occurred in 35.1% and 74.0% of episodes, respectively. The association between clothing type and behavior was statistically significant under the independence assumption, $\chi^2(1, N = 1{,}391) = 212.08$, nominal $p < .001$, with a moderate association magnitude (Cramér's $V = .390$; contingency coefficient = .364). However, repeated observations of unidentified children and unaccounted mosque-level clustering limit the precision of inferential estimates.

Conclusion: Religious clothing was associated with a higher observed proportion of calm behavior during mosque worship. The findings do not establish causality, given potential repeated observations, unmeasured confounders, and unavailable interobserver reliability estimates.

Keywords: Religious Clothing, Child Behavior, Mosque Worship, Naturalistic Observation, Indonesia.

Introduction

Children's behavior in public spaces is shaped through the interaction of individual characteristics, family socialization, and the normative demands of the surrounding environment. Parents function as the main agents in transmitting behavioral norms to children, including expectations regarding manners, appearance, and conduct in specific social contexts (Brouwer et al., 2023; Deater-Deckard & Lansford, 2017). During early school age, children gradually learn that different places require different forms of behavior. In public worship spaces such as mosques, this process becomes especially salient because the environment is structured by expectations of calmness, respect, order, and collective discipline (Bakar et al., 2019). In such contexts, children not only observe adult behavior but also learn to adjust their actions in response to environmental cues and shared norms. Developmental research suggests that parenting, social symbols, and contextual structure contribute to the development of behavioral patterns as children learn to interpret social cues and adjust their responses across settings (Repacholi et al., 2014; Wesarg-Menzel et al., 2023).

In this context, children's clothing serves not only as body covering but also as a visible social symbol that may communicate religious identity, role expectations, and culturally recognized forms of conduct. From the perspective of social and cultural psychology, clothing may function as a situational cue that helps individuals recognize the norms associated with a particular setting. The concept of enclothed cognition has been used to explain how symbolic meanings attached to clothing may be associated with thoughts and behavior in adults (Adam & Galinsky, 2012; Horton et al., 2025). However, the application of this perspective to children in religious settings remains largely unexplored. Therefore, in the present study, enclothed cognition is considered only as a conceptual lens rather than as a confirmed explanatory mechanism. For children, religious clothing worn in a mosque may represent one visible marker associated with worship participation and context recognition. Previous studies have suggested that visual and symbolic cues may be associated with normative awareness and behavioral patterns in socially structured environments (Horton et al., 2025; Hofmann et al., 2014). Accordingly, clothing may be understood not only as appearance but also as a symbolic element associated with how children interpret worship settings and display behavioral patterns within them.

Previous research has shown that clothing plays an important role in social identity, interaction, and participation across different social and cultural environments. Several studies have reported that clothing choices are associated with self-perception and patterns of social behavior in both general and religious contexts (Chang et al., 2018). In parallel, studies on children's clothing suggest that dress is shaped by cultural, family, and social norms and may contribute to comfort, self-expression, and social adjustment (Santiago et al., 2024). In Muslim contexts, religious clothing is generally understood as attire aligned with socially recognized norms of modesty and propriety during worship. Clothing such as koko shirts, sarongs, peci, kurtas, and robes may therefore function not only practically but also symbolically by marking religious participation and communal belonging (Rajina, 2024; Thimm, 2021).

Children's behavior in social and religious environments is also shaped by parenting practices, family relationships, and community norms. Parents act as primary socialization agents through role modeling and decision-making related to children's clothing and behavior, both of which are gradually observed and internalized by the child (Chang et al., 2018). Research across religious contexts suggests that parents often emphasize appropriate clothing during worship because it is associated with comfort, discipline, and respectful participation in religious activities (Ahmed, 2013). Other studies have shown that supportive family environments and community involvement contribute to prosocial behavior and positive behavioral patterns during childhood (Cheng & Furnham, 2021; Geerts-Perry et al., 2021). Previous studies suggest that children's participation in religious activities may contribute to discipline, the development of behavioral patterns, and the internalization

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of shared norms through repeated exposure to ritual structure, family guidance, and adult modeling (King & Furrow, 2004; Vermeer, 2014). Although mosques have been widely recognized as spaces for religious socialization (Bakar et al., 2019; Sözeri et al., 2022), research examining whether symbolic attributes worn by children, such as clothing, are associated with behavioral patterns during worship remains limited.

This gap is important because children often rely on concrete and visible cues when learning the expectations associated with different social settings. In highly structured worship spaces such as mosques, clothing may serve as one of these visible cues by helping children distinguish sacred space from ordinary space and recognize the norms associated with collective worship. Rather than viewing clothing merely as an external attribute, it may be understood as part of a broader social and cultural context through which children interpret their surroundings and display behavioral patterns during worship. The present study focuses exclusively on observational associations rather than identifying causal psychological mechanisms. Accordingly, this study aims to examine the association between clothing type and the behavioral patterns of Muslim boys aged 6–9 years during mosque worship in Indonesia. The research question guiding this study is: How is clothing type associated with children's behavioral patterns during worship activities in mosques?

Methods and Materials

Research Design

This study employed a repeated naturalistic observational design within a cross-sectional framework to examine the association between clothing type and behavioral patterns during mosque worship. Observation was selected because it allows naturally occurring behavior to be documented without experimental manipulation, making it suitable for studying children's conduct in an authentic religious setting (Kawulich, 2005). To provide limited contextual information, semi-structured interviews were conducted with two parents. These interviews were used only as illustrative contextual narratives and were not intended as a substantial qualitative component or triangulation strategy (Farid, 2022; Williamson, 2018). Because individual identification was not conducted, the same child may have been observed on multiple occasions across observation days and worship phases. Consequently, the dataset reflects child-presence observations rather than uniquely identified individuals, and this issue should be considered when interpreting the findings.

Research Setting

The study was conducted in eight semi-urban mosques in Indonesia during Ramadan. These mosques were located in residential communities and regularly hosted congregational worship activities attended by both adults and children. The mosques were selected based on accessibility and proximity to the researchers' residences, allowing repeated observations to be conducted across multiple worship periods. The setting was selected because Ramadan is a period of increased congregational worship and higher child attendance in mosques, creating repeated opportunities to observe children's behavior in a norm-rich environment. Observations were conducted before the azan, during the azan, during iqamah, after prayer, and during the sermon. The observations from these phases were pooled for analysis because the primary objective of the study was to examine overall associations between clothing type and behavioral patterns rather than phase-specific behavioral variation. While Ramadan provided increased opportunities to observe children's participation in mosque activities, behavioral patterns observed during Ramadan may not fully represent behavior during other periods of the year and should therefore be interpreted within this specific religious context.

Participants and Observation Unit

The participants were Muslim boys aged approximately 6–9 years who attended mosque worship activities during the observation period. Age was estimated based on observable physical characteristics because individual

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demographic information was not collected. Only boys were included because observations were conducted in male prayer areas, where boys were more consistently visible and accessible for observation. Across ten consecutive days, a total of 1,391 child-presence observations were recorded. The unit of analysis was each observed child-presence episode rather than uniquely identified individuals. Because individual identification was not conducted, the same child may have been observed on multiple occasions across observation days or worship phases. Consequently, the observations cannot be assumed to be fully independent and should be interpreted accordingly. Participants were grouped into children wearing religious clothing and children wearing casual clothing.

Observation Guide

Data were collected using a structured observation guide developed by the researchers. The guide focused on two observational domains: clothing type and behavioral category. To strengthen content appropriateness, the observation guide was reviewed by two experts, one in Islamic Sharia and one in child behavior. Religious clothing was operationally defined as attire commonly worn by boys during worship, including a koko shirt, loose kurta extending below the waist, jubbah, or similar religious garments, combined with trousers or a sarong. The use of a peci was optional. Casual clothing referred to ordinary non-religious attire commonly worn outside worship settings.

Children's behavior was classified into two categories: calm behavior and disruptive behavior. Calm behavior referred to sitting orderly in the prayer row and remaining generally settled during worship activities. Disruptive behavior included running, speaking loudly, throwing objects, moving excessively, or demonstrating persistent difficulty remaining seated during the observation episode. Behavioral classification was based on the child's predominant observable behavior during each observation episode. Observers used a standardized observation form containing predefined criteria for clothing and behavioral classifications. Although the observation guide was reviewed for content appropriateness, formal pilot testing and inter-rater reliability assessment were not conducted.

Procedures

Observations were conducted over ten consecutive days during Ramadan in eight semi-urban mosques. Data were collected during selected worship periods, including before the azan, during the azan, during iqamah, after prayer, and during sermons or religious talks. During each observation period, observers recorded children's clothing type and visible behavior using the structured observation guide. No intervention or experimental manipulation was introduced, and observations were conducted within naturally occurring worship activities. Following the observation period, semi-structured interviews were conducted with two mothers whose children regularly attended mosque activities. The interviews were conducted to obtain limited contextual information regarding children's clothing practices and behavior during mosque participation. The interview findings were used only as illustrative contextual narratives and were not intended as a formal qualitative component or triangulation strategy.

Statistical Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using JASP (Love et al., 2019). Chi-square analysis was used to examine the association between clothing type and behavioral patterns, while the contingency coefficient was calculated to estimate the strength of the observed association. Cross-tabulation was used to present the distribution of calm and disruptive behavior across the two clothing categories. Cramér's V (the square root of χ^2/N for a 2×2 table) was calculated as an effect-size measure. A Pearson χ^2 test without continuity correction was used for descriptive comparison of these observational episodes.

Because the unit of analysis consisted of child-presence observations rather than uniquely identified individuals, the possibility of repeated observations of the same child could not be excluded. Consequently, the assumption of complete independence among observations may not have been fully

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satisfied and should be considered when interpreting the inferential results. Interview data were summarized descriptively and used only as illustrative contextual narratives. No formal qualitative analysis was conducted, and the interview findings were not intended to validate or confirm the quantitative results. Potential confounding variables, including parental supervision, family religiosity, child temperament, familiarity with mosque routines, and mosque-level characteristics, were not measured and therefore could not be controlled statistically. Accordingly, the findings should be interpreted as observational associations rather than evidence of causal relationships. As observations were not linked to unique children or mosque-by-session clusters, neither cluster-robust standard errors nor child-level repeated-measures models could be calculated from the reported aggregated table; hence nominal p values may overstate precision.

Ethical Considerations

All procedures followed applicable ethical standards. The authors report approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the Muslim University of Indonesia (No. 154/A.1), and permission to conduct observations was granted by mosque management. No identifying personal information was reported in the study. Parent interview data were presented anonymously, and confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process.

Findings and Results

Association and Magnitude

The recorded observation counts were cross-tabulated by clothing category and binary behavior classification. The Pearson chi-square statistic and effect sizes are reported in Tables 1. Distributional counts and within-clothing proportions appear in Table 2.

Table 1.

Pearson chi-square test of clothing category by behavior

Statistic	Value	df	Nominal p
χ^2	212.079	1	< .001
Observations	1,391	—	—

Note. Values are recorded child-presence episodes, not identifiable unique children.

The analysis showed a statistically significant association between clothing type and children's behavior, $\chi^2(1, N = 1{,}391) = 212.079$, nominal $p < .001$. This finding indicates that the distribution of observed behavioral patterns differed between children wearing religious clothing and those wearing casual clothing during mosque worship. However, statistical significance should be interpreted cautiously because the dataset consisted of child-presence observations rather than uniquely identified individuals, and repeated observations of the same child may have occurred The test matches the observed 2 × 2 frequency table; however, inferential significance is conditional on independence, which may not hold for repeated child-presence episodes.

To estimate the strength of this association, a contingency coefficient was calculated. The contingency coefficient was $C = .364$ and Cramér's $V = .390$ (computed from $\chi^2 = 212.079$ and $N = 1{,}391$). Together, these effect size measures suggest a moderate association between clothing type and observed behavioral patterns during mosque worship. However, these values should be interpreted cautiously because the study employed an observational design and the dataset consisted of child-presence observations rather than uniquely identified individuals. Accordingly, the findings indicate an association between clothing type and behavioral patterns during worship activities but do not support causal conclusions. A more detailed distribution of behavior across clothing categories is presented in Table 2.

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Table 2.

Observed behavior by clothing category

Clothing type	Calm, n (%)	Disruptive, n (%)	Total n
Casual dress	198 (26.0)	563 (74.0)	761
Religious dress	409 (64.9)	221 (35.1)	630
Overall	607 (43.6)	784 (56.4)	1,391

Note. Values are recorded child-presence episodes, not identifiable unique children.

Among children wearing religious clothing (n = 630), calm behavior was observed in 409 cases (64.9%), whereas disruptive behavior was observed in 221 cases (35.1%). In contrast, among children wearing casual clothing (n = 761), calm behavior was observed in 198 cases (26.0%), whereas disruptive behavior was observed in 563 cases (74.0%). These subgroup percentages indicate a clear difference in the distribution of observed behavioral patterns across the two clothing categories. The unit of analysis consisted of child-presence observations rather than uniquely identified individuals, and repeated observations of the same child may have occurred across observation periods.

Contextual Parent Interviews

Two parent interviews provided limited contextual perspectives regarding children's clothing practices and behavior during mosque participation. One mother explained that her child began wearing mosque-appropriate clothing after suggestions from people in the surrounding community and concerns that he frequently ran around and was occasionally injured while playing in the mosque. According to the mother, after regularly wearing a koko shirt, the child appeared calmer during prayer and began referring to it as his "prayer clothes." Another mother reported that when her child previously attended the mosque wearing casual clothing such as a T-shirt and jeans, he often ran around despite repeated reminders. She stated that after regularly wearing a koko shirt with trousers or a sarong, the child appeared more orderly and was able to sit quietly beside his father during prayer. These narratives represent parental perceptions of their children's behavior and should be interpreted cautiously because they were based on only two interviews. The interview findings were used solely to provide contextual information and were not intended to validate or confirm the quantitative results.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study found a significant association between clothing type and Muslim boys' behavior during mosque worship. Children wearing religious clothing were more frequently observed displaying calm behavior. Children wearing casual clothing were more frequently observed displaying disruptive behavior. The contingency coefficient and Cramér's V indicated a moderate association between the two variables. Although the observational design does not support causal claims, the overall pattern suggests that clothing type was associated with differences in children's behavioral patterns during worship activities. The findings may be interpreted within the broader context of mosque participation, where clothing, parental preparation, religious routines, and social expectations are closely intertwined. The interview narratives provided limited contextual perspectives regarding how some parents perceived the relationship between clothing practices and children's behavior during mosque participation, but these accounts should not be interpreted as confirmatory evidence of the quantitative findings. No observed difference should be attributed to attire alone.

From a developmental perspective, children learn to navigate social environments through repeated exposure to visible cues, routines, and shared expectations. During childhood, behavior is shaped not only by individual characteristics but also by the social and cultural contexts in which children participate (Repacholi et al., 2014; Wesarg-Menzel et al., 2023). Clothing may represent one of several visible cues associated with particular social settings. For children, specific forms of dress may help distinguish one setting from another and may be associated with the

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expectations commonly linked to that environment. In the present study, religious clothing was associated with calmer behavioral patterns during mosque worship. However, because the study did not directly measure psychological processes, the findings cannot determine whether this association reflects symbolic cueing, parental preparation, broader religio-socialization processes, or a combination of these factors.

This interpretation is broadly consistent with the concept of enclothed cognition, which emphasizes that clothing may carry symbolic meanings beyond its physical function (Adam & Galinsky, 2012). Although this concept has been examined primarily in adult populations, it offers a useful conceptual lens for considering how symbolic forms of dress may be associated with behavior in particular social settings. In the present study, religious clothing may be viewed as one visible symbol associated with worship participation and culturally recognized expectations within the mosque environment. Recent synthesis gives qualified support to enclothed cognition but also documents replication concerns, especially in earlier studies (Horton et al., 2025). However, because the present study did not directly assess cognitive or psychological processes, enclothed cognition should be regarded only as a possible interpretive framework rather than as a confirmed explanation for the observed association.

The cultural context of the mosque is essential for interpreting these findings. Mosques are not merely physical spaces for prayer; they are also social environments characterized by shared expectations regarding order, modesty, and respectful conduct. In Muslim communities, religious clothing is commonly associated with propriety and readiness for worship and therefore carries symbolic meaning within collective practice (DeCoursey, 2019; Fharose, 2025). Clothing such as koko shirts, sarongs, kurtas, robes, and peci may signal participation in a setting associated with different social expectations from those of ordinary daily life. The present findings are consistent with the view that behavioral patterns observed during worship may be associated with multiple influences, including adult guidance, social expectations, and culturally recognizable symbols embedded within the worship environment. Thus, the association observed in this study may be understood as reflecting the broader cultural meanings attached to religious dress within mosque participation. Cultural interpretation of these visible practices does not establish an individually measured psychological pathway (Seyed Alitabar, 2025).

The findings also fit with literature on family socialization and religious participation. Parents act as primary agents in children's behavioral learning by organizing routines, modeling conduct, and transmitting social norms (Brouwer et al., 2023; Deater-Deckard & Lansford, 2017). In religious contexts, appropriate clothing may also be used by parents as part of preparing children to participate respectfully in worship (Ahmed, 2013) Family support may further contribute to children's behavioral patterns during worship participation and to broader prosocial development (Cheng & Furnham, 2021). The interview narratives provided limited contextual perspectives consistent with this view. Both parents described clothing as part of a preparatory routine associated with mosque participation and respectful conduct during worship. Although these accounts are anecdotal and should be interpreted cautiously, they suggest that clothing may be embedded within a broader process of family-guided socialization rather than operating as an isolated factor. Research on Indonesian children likewise highlights the joint roles of parents and local cultural norms in socializing everyday behavior, although it addresses a different behavioral domain (Rabbani et al., 2026).

Previous studies suggest that religious involvement and participation in ritualized practices are associated with socially appropriate behavior through family guidance, monitoring, and exposure to structured expectations (Guo, 2018; Kim-Spoon et al., 2014; Marcus & McCullough, 2021; McCullough & Willoughby, 2009). However, most previous studies have focused on religious involvement and family processes rather than on symbolic attributes worn by children during worship. The present study contributes to this area by showing that clothing type was associated with observable differences in behavioral patterns among Muslim boys in mosques. Religious clothing may therefore be viewed

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as one visible element within the broader cultural context of worship participation. Because psychological processes were not directly measured, the present study cannot determine the specific mechanisms underlying the observed association. At the same time, clothing should not be interpreted as the sole determinant of children's behavior. The association observed in this study likely reflects multiple influences, including parental guidance, familiarity with mosque routines, peer and adult modeling, child temperament, and the broader worship environment. Religious clothing may therefore represent one visible element within a wider social and cultural context. For this reason, the findings should be interpreted as evidence of association rather than direct effect. This distinction is important for avoiding overly simplified explanations of children's behavior in religious settings.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The observations were conducted over a ten-day period and only during Ramadan, when worship participation may differ from ordinary months. The study was also limited to eight semi-urban mosques in Indonesia, which restricts the generalizability of the findings to other regions, age groups, and religious settings. Furthermore, the study included only Muslim boys observed in male worship areas, and therefore the findings cannot be generalized to girls or broader child populations without further investigation. In addition, the unit of analysis consisted of child-presence observations rather than uniquely identified individuals. As a result, repeated observations of the same child may have occurred, and complete independence among observations cannot be assumed.

In addition, the binary classification of behavior as calm or disruptive was intentionally simplified for observational purposes and may not capture more subtle variations in children's behavior across different worship situations. The interview component was also very limited, involving only two parents, and therefore cannot be considered representative of broader family perspectives. Variables such as parenting style, family religiosity, child temperament, and the physical and social characteristics of each mosque were not directly measured and may represent plausible alternative explanations for the observed association. In addition, mosque-level factors such as congregation density, sermon length, physical layout, adult supervision practices, and local community norms may also have influenced the observed behavioral patterns. Future studies could extend observations beyond Ramadan, include more diverse settings, and examine the role of family, social, and cultural factors associated with children's behavior during worship. No interobserver agreement or pre-registered behavior coding protocol was documented in the submitted report; classification error is therefore possible. The lack of unique child identifiers precludes separating within-child from between-child association, and mosque-level clustering may further affect uncertainty.

Conclusion

The observed data indicate that religious clothing worn by Muslim boys was associated with differences in behavioral patterns during mosque worship. Children wearing religious clothing were more frequently observed displaying calm behavior, whereas children wearing casual clothing were more frequently observed displaying disruptive behavior. The pattern suggests that religious clothing may represent one visible element associated with worship participation within a broader social and cultural context. At the same time, children's behavior in mosques should not be attributed to clothing alone, because it is also influenced by parental guidance, familiarity with worship routines, social expectations, and other contextual factors. The study contributes child-focused observational evidence on the association between religious clothing and behavioral patterns among Muslim boys during mosque participation. These findings should be interpreted as context-specific and exploratory, reflecting an observed association within Ramadan mosque settings in Indonesia rather than evidence of a causal or psychological process.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

Approved as reported by the authors by the Research Ethics Committee of the Muslim University of Indonesia (No. 154/A.1); mosque management permission was obtained.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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Authors' contributions

Arneliza: conceptualization, methodology, original draft, review and editing, supervision; Ellisa Vikalista: investigation, data curation, funding acquisition; Tri Cicik Wijayanti: investigation, resources, funding acquisition; Asnani: investigation, project administration, funding acquisition; Imam Husni Al Amin: investigation, funding acquisition; Siti Rohaya: investigation, validation, funding acquisition; Dewi Kusumaningsih: investigation, formal analysis, funding acquisition; Ja'far Amir: visualization, formal analysis.

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