

Research article

The Influence of Father's presence on College Students' Mental Health: The Role of Religiosity as a Mediator and Moderator

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Abstract

This research seeks to investigate how a father's presence affects the mental health of college students, with a focus on the role of religiosity as both a mediating and moderating variable. The rise in mental health issues among college students is frequently linked to academic stress, emotional instability, and a lack of family support, particularly from father figures. Religiosity is considered a protective element that can enhance students' psychological resilience. A sample of 330 college students aged 18–24 ($M = 20$, $SD = 1.207$) participated in this research through accidental sampling. The tools employed included the Mental Health Continuum–Short Form (MHC–SF), the Centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS), and the Father's Presence Questionnaire (FPQ). The researchers applied regression analysis and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to examine the mediating and moderating effects using Jamovi software. The findings indicated that both a father's presence and religiosity significantly enhanced the mental health of college students ($R = 0.922$; $R^2 = 85\%$; $p < 0.001$). In the mediation model, a father's presence was shown to increase religiosity ($\beta = 0.53$; $p < 0.001$) and directly enhance mental health ($\beta = 0.80$; $p < 0.001$). Religiosity also had a positive impact on mental health ($\beta = 0.20$; $p < 0.001$) and partially mediated the relationship (indirect effect $\beta = 0.10$; $p < 0.001$). The moderation analysis revealed that religiosity amplified the influence of a father's presence on mental health (β interaction = 0.00136; $p = 0.027$). The most pronounced effect of a father's presence was observed in students exhibiting high levels of religiosity ($\beta = 0.418$). These results affirm the significance of a father's presence and religiosity in promoting mental health among students.

Keywords: father's presence, religiosity, mental health, mediation, moderation.

1. Introduction

The mental health of college students is increasingly recognized as a critical concern due to the diverse academic, personal, and social challenges encountered during their higher education experience, which elevate the risk of psychological distress such as stress, anxiety, and depression (Pedrelli et al., 2015; Ou et al., 2025). In addressing these challenges, the family emerges as a crucial protective factor. Eggen & Kauchak, 2012 emphasized that a sense of both physical and psychological safety provided by the family serves as an essential foundation for personal well-being. Research conducted by Luvira et al., 2023 further indicates that more than fifty percent of college students face significant mental health issues rooted in inadequate family communication and domestic abuse. These findings highlight the importance of the family as the closest environment influencing the mental health development of students, as outlined in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model (Atkinson & Hornby, 2002). Within the family context, the presence of fathers holds particular significance (Johnson, 1996). A father's presence encompasses not only physical availability but also emotional support, engagement, and a warm relationship that fosters a sense of security in children (Krampe & Newton, 2006; Yusof et al., 2023). Positive paternal involvement has been demonstrated to enhance emotional regulation, self-esteem, and psychological well-being, whereas paternal absence correlates with increased psychological vulnerability (Thomas et al., 2008). The research by Yusof et al. (2023) underscores that paternal presence and involvement are as vital as maternal presence in supporting the social, emotional, and academic development of children (Kucukkaragoz, 2025). Children with actively involved fathers tend to exhibit greater confidence, emotional security, and improved communication and cognitive skills. This study conducted in Malaysia highlights the critical role of paternal involvement in shaping children's psychosocial development and emphasizes the necessity of developing specific modules to improve fathers' understanding and skills. According to the Kemenkes, (2023), the highest prevalence of depression in Indonesia is observed among individuals aged 15–24 years (6.2%), which underscores the importance of familial factors in promoting and sustaining mental health among adolescents and young adults (Sarfika et al., 2024). Habibah et al. (2021) reported that



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students at Sriwijaya University exhibit high rates of mental disorders, with 46% at risk of depression, 74.2% at risk of anxiety, and 57.9% at risk of stress. Significant influencing factors include gender, GPA, faculty, semester, residence, history of chronic illness, and family history of mental disorders. These findings reaffirm the imperative for more comprehensive mental health interventions within the university setting.

Mental health issues persist today, with a warning highlighted by Nathania et al. (2025) about rising adolescent suicide rates, emphasizing the need to focus on young people's mental well-being. In Indonesia, monitoring the mental health of school and college students is critical. Generation Alpha faces higher vulnerability to psychological distress due to extensive digital exposure, poor emotional literacy, and limited empathetic family communication. The emotional absence of fathers and reduced parental roles can delay early detection and intervention. Fathers play a vital role in providing emotional support, regulation, and fostering spiritual values. A warm, religious family environment can protect against stress, depression, and other mental health issues among adolescents and students. According to Karisma et al. (2024), bullying has increased significantly in Indonesia, adversely affecting mental health by causing emotional disorders, stress, and suicidal tendencies. Data from the X Psychological Consultation Institute (2025) suggest many college students suffer from moderate to severe depression linked to their fathers' emotional absence, despite their physical presence, often due to poor interaction, infidelity, and long-term lack of communication. Some students cope better, relying on strong religious beliefs to accept family circumstances and manage their mental health, with religiosity providing a sense of purpose, coping, and self-acceptance. This aligns with studies by Lucchetti et al. (2021) and Bosma (2024), which show religiosity enhances psychological well-being, reduces distress, and bolsters self-identity. Sadati & Mahdavi (2023) further confirm that religiosity acts as a psychological resource, strengthening mental health and adaptability. Mahamid & Bdier (2021) demonstrate that positive religious coping is linked to lower stress and depression during COVID-19, with individuals practicing such strategies exhibiting better emotional regulation and mental stability.

Previous studies indicate that parental religiosity and religious harmony between parents positively influence children's and adolescents' mental health (Multahada et al., 2025). For instance, a community study with 2,230 pre-adolescents showed that inter-parental religious discord heightened the risk of both internalizing and externalizing symptoms, especially when mothers were less involved in religious activities (Van Der Jagt-Jelsma et al., 2011). Although this research focused on preadolescents, developmental theories propose that family relationships and parental values continue to impact individuals into emerging adulthood, despite increasing independence (Arnett, 2000; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). During college years, parents-particularly fathers-still influence students' psychological well-being through emotional support, role modeling, and the internalization of religious principles. Consequently, earlier developmental research provides a valuable foundation for exploring whether a father's presence and religiosity remain significant for college students' mental health (Moore, 2023).

These findings establish a theoretical foundation suggesting that parental presence particularly that of fathers and religious values can influence the mental health of children (Pusztai & Fényes, 2022). Extending this perspective to college students, religiosity may function as both a mediator and moderator in the relationship between paternal presence and mental health outcomes. In the context of this research, religiosity is regarded as a significant factor, as it can mediate the impact of paternal presence on psychological well-being and bolster students' capacity to sustain mental health despite limited paternal involvement. Accordingly, religiosity is a crucial element in comprehending the psychological dynamics linking fatherhood and the mental health of college students. Additional studies also indicate that religiosity may mediate or moderate the relationship between stress and mental health (Fabricatore et al., 2000).

This study treats religiosity as both a mediator and a moderator, since it can influence psychological processes in two ways. As a mediator, a father's presence may encourage the internalization of religious beliefs and practices by providing parental modeling, emotional bonds, and religious socialization. These religious values can then foster a sense of purpose, adaptive coping strategies, hope, and overall psychological well-being, which boosts mental health (King & Boyatzis, 2015; Lucchetti et al., 2021). Essentially, the beneficial effect of a father's presence may partly arise because supportive fathers help develop stronger religiosity.

Religiosity can also serve as a moderator by enhancing psychological resilience when students lack paternal support. Students with strong religiosity tend to view adversity more positively, utilize constructive religious coping strategies, and find comfort through their spiritual beliefs, which helps mitigate the adverse effects of limited paternal presence on mental health (Pargament, 1997; Mahamid & Bdier, 2021; Sadati & Mahdavi, 2023). Therefore, the link between father's

presence and mental health is likely stronger for students with high religiosity compared to those with lower levels. Considering the background of these studies, there is a notable lack of research that combines father's presence, religiosity, and college students' mental health into a single model. While prior research shows that father's presence supports psychological well-being (Yusof et al., 2023) and that religiosity correlates with improved mental health and adaptive coping (Lucchetti et al., 2021; Sadati & Mahdavi, 2023; Bosma, 2024), few studies have explored religiosity as both a mediating and moderating factor linking father's presence to mental health in college students. Filling this gap could offer a more complete understanding of how family ties and religious resources jointly enhance psychological well-being during emerging adulthood. Addressing this deficiency is a key research objective for this study. From an advanced perspective, it presents a comprehensive approach by investigating religiosity's dual role in the relationship between father's presence and students' mental health.

This study aims to fill this gap by (1) examining how Father's presence and religiosity affect college students' mental health, (2) exploring whether religiosity acts as a mediator, and (3) investigating if religiosity serves as a moderator in this link. The findings are expected to contribute to the literature on family influence and religiosity in college students' mental health and support the development of family- and spirituality-based interventions. The research hypotheses are: H1: Father's presence and religiosity influence college students' mental health; H2: Religiosity mediates the relationship between Father's presence and mental health; H3: Religiosity moderates this relationship.

2. Research Methods

The study involved a sample of 330 university students aged between 18 and 24 years, with a mean age of 20 years and a standard deviation of 1.207. The data collected exhibited a normal distribution, as evidenced by an Exact Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.062. Participants were recruited through accidental sampling in Jakarta, employing a quantitative research methodology.

Mental health is operationally defined as a state wherein students are not only free from mental disorders but also exhibit a stable and balanced mental condition, enabling them to function effectively in daily life. It encompasses three primary aspects: emotional well-being, social well-being, and psychological well-being. Mental health was assessed using the Mental Health Continuum Short Form (MHC-SF) developed by (Keyes, 2005). The total score indicates the level of mental health, with higher scores signifying better mental health, and lower scores indicating poorer mental health. The MHC-SF consists of 14 items covering the three core aspects Emotional Well-being, Social Well-being, and Psychological Well-being with item scores ranging from a minimum of 0.755 to a maximum of 0.873. Responses are recorded on a scale from 1 (Never) to 6 (Every day). The instrument demonstrates excellent reliability, with a coefficient of 0.970.

Religiosity is defined as how much an individual integrates religious values, beliefs, and experiences into their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in accordance with religious teachings. It reflects the extent to which a religious meaning system forms a key part of a person's personality and influences their worldview, decisions, and daily routines. Researchers assess religiosity using the Centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS), which covers five dimensions: intellectual (religious knowledge), ideological (beliefs in religious values), public practice (participation in social religious activities), private practice (personal worship), and religious experience (emotional and spiritual encounters with God). The overall score indicates a student's level of religiosity, with higher scores signifying greater religiosity and lower scores indicating less. The CRS includes 20 valid items, with scores ranging from 0.570 to 0.762 on a scale from 1 (Never) to 5 (Very Often), and a reliability coefficient of 0.947.

Father's presence is operationally defined as a student's subjective perception of their father's presence and involvement in their life, both emotionally and physically. This construct captures how close, cared for, and connected a child feels to their father, regardless of his physical presence. It comprises two key dimensions: the relationship with the father including feelings, perceptions of involvement, and physical contact and beliefs about fatherhood, such as the child's view of the father's influence on their life. An instrument developed by Krampe & Newton, (2006) measured Father's presence. The total score indicates the level of perception, with higher scores signifying a stronger perception and lower scores indicating a weaker one. The Father's presence Questionnaire (FPQ), containing 44 items (41 favorable, 3 unfavorable), uses a four-point Likert scale strongly disagree (SD), disagree (D), agree (A), and strongly agree (SA). The items ranged from a low of 0.263 ($r \approx 0.108$, $N=330$) to a high of 0.884, with a reliability of 0.986. This study

employed a quantitative method with data analysis techniques including multiple linear regression, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), and moderation analysis conducted with Jamovi software.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Results

The research results below provide a description of the subjects categorized by gender and age, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Research Subject Data

Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	131	39.7%
Female	199	60.3%
Age		
18	35	10.6%
19	81	24.5%
20	104	31.5%
21	76	23.0%
22	29	8.8%
23	2	0.6%
24	3	0.9%

According to Table 1, this research encompassed 330 university students as participants. Regarding gender distribution, a majority of the respondents were female (60.3%), whereas male respondents accounted for 39.7%. Concerning age groups, most respondents fell within the 19–21 year age range, with 24.5% aged 19, 31.5% aged 20, and 23.0% aged 21. Other participants were 18 years old (10.6%), 22 years old (8.8%), and less than 1% were aged 23 and 24 years. This age distribution suggests that most respondents were in late adolescence to early adulthood a critical developmental period marked by significant advancements related to self-identity, emotional independence, and the formation of life values, including religiosity and mental well-being. Therefore, the age profile of the respondents is highly pertinent to the focus of this study, which investigates the relationship between Father's presence, religiosity, and the mental health of university students (Misran et al., 2021).

Table 2. Categorization of Research Variables

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Mental Health		
Low	85	25.8
Average	49	14.8
High	196	59.4
Religious		
Highly	247	74.8%
Religious	37	11.2%
Non-Religious	46	13.9%
Father's presence		
Low	321	97.3
Average	9	2.7
Totally	330	100

According to Table 2, most students (59.4%) exhibit high mental health, while 25.8% are classified as having low mental health, and 14.8% fall into the moderate category. This suggests that while the majority of students maintain good mental health, approximately one-third may still need support regarding their mental well-being. Regarding religiosity, most students are categorized as Highly Religious (74.8%), with 11.2% as Religious and 13.9% as non-religious. The significant proportion of religious students highlights the importance of religion or belief in their lives, which warrants analysis as a mediator or moderator in the link between Father's presence and mental health. Meanwhile, nearly all students (97.3%) report low Father's presence, with only 2.7% indicating moderate Father's presence. This suggests that father figures are generally limited in students' lives. Therefore, despite low Father's presence, high religiosity may help students

sustain or improve their mental health, supporting the idea that religiosity functions as a mediator and moderator in this relationship.

Table 3. Linear Regression

Model	R	R ²
1	0.922	0.850

Note. Models estimated using sample size of N=330

The linear regression results show that using Father's presence and Religiosity as predictors provides a very strong and significant explanation of Student Mental Health. This is demonstrated by a multiple correlation coefficient (R) of 0.922 and an R² value of 0.850. The high R² suggests that these two variables jointly account for 85% of the variance in Student Mental Health, with the remaining 15% attributed to other factors not included in this model.

Table 4. Model Coefficients – Mental Health

Predictor	Estimate	SE	t	p
Intercept	-9.846	1.8295	-5.38	<0.001
Religiosity	0.209	0.0267	7.86	<0.001
Father's Presence	0.399	0.0126	31.77	<0.001

Additionally, the regression coefficients reveal that both variables positively and significantly impact student mental health ($p < 0.001$). Specifically, Father's presence exerts a stronger effect than religiosity, with coefficients of 0.399 and 0.209 respectively. This indicates that an increase in Father's presence has a more substantial benefit on student mental health compared to an increase in religiosity. Nonetheless, both remain highly significant, suggesting that students with both a present father and high religiosity generally have better mental health. These factors serve as protective elements, reinforcing students' psychological resilience.

The CFA results in Table 5 show that the measurement model fits well and is appropriate for use. The CFI and TLI scores are excellent, the RMSEA is acceptable, and the χ^2/df , GFI, and SRMR values further confirm the model's good fit. Therefore, the constructs of Father's presence, Religiosity, and Mental Health are deemed valid and reliable for subsequent SEM analysis.

Table 5. Measurement Model Feasibility Index Based on CFA Analysis Results

Feasibility Index	Value	Criteria Cutoff	Interpretation
χ^2/df	< 3.00	≤ 3.00	Good fit
GFI	0.95	≥ 0.90	Good fit
CFI	0.982	≥ 0.95	Excellent fit
TLI	0.977	≥ 0.95	Excellent fit
RMSEA	0.0759	≤ 0.08	Acceptable fit
90% CI RMSEA	[0.0618 – 0.0903]	—	Within acceptable range
SRMR	< 0.08	≤ 0.08	Good fit

Table 6. Analysis results showing the relationships between latent constructs and the mediating role of religiosity within the SEM model

Construction and Dimensions	Relationship Path	β (Std.)	P	Interpretation
Father's Presence (X)	Feelings about Father	0.91	—	Basic indicator; indicates the child's feelings toward the father.
	Perceptions of Father Involvement	0.94	< 0.001	Highest loading; measures the father's emotional involvement and participation.
	Physical Relationship with Father	0.78	< 0.001	Physical contact contributes significantly.
	Conceptions of Father's Influence	0.52	< 0.001	Perceptions of father influence are lower, less dominant.
Religiosity (Y2)	Intellectual	0.85	—	Cognitive dimension; the reference point for religiosity.
	Ideology	0.88	< 0.001	Religious belief supports religiosity.
	Public Practice	0.82	< 0.001	Public religious participation.
	Private Practice	0.93	< 0.001	Private worship most strongly reflects religiosity.
	Spiritual Experience	0.91	< 0.001	Inner experience is a key component.
Mental Health (Y1)	Emotional Well-Being	0.87	—	A basic indicator of psychological well-being.
	Social Well-Being	0.91	< 0.001	Social relationships contribute significantly.

	Psychological Well-Being	0.94	< 0.001	Psychological aspects most strongly reflect well-being.
Structural Model	Father's Presence → Religiosity	0.53	< 0.001	Father's presence increases students' religiosity.
	Religiosity → Mental Health	0.20	< 0.001	Religiosity improves mental health (moderate effect).
	Father's Presence → Mental Health	0.80	< 0.001	Father's presence directly improves mental health (strong effect).
	Father's Presence → Religiosity → Mental Health	0.10	< 0.001	Partial mediation by religiosity is significant.
	Father's Presence → Mental Health (Total Effect)	0.90	< 0.001	The total effect is very strong (direct + indirect).

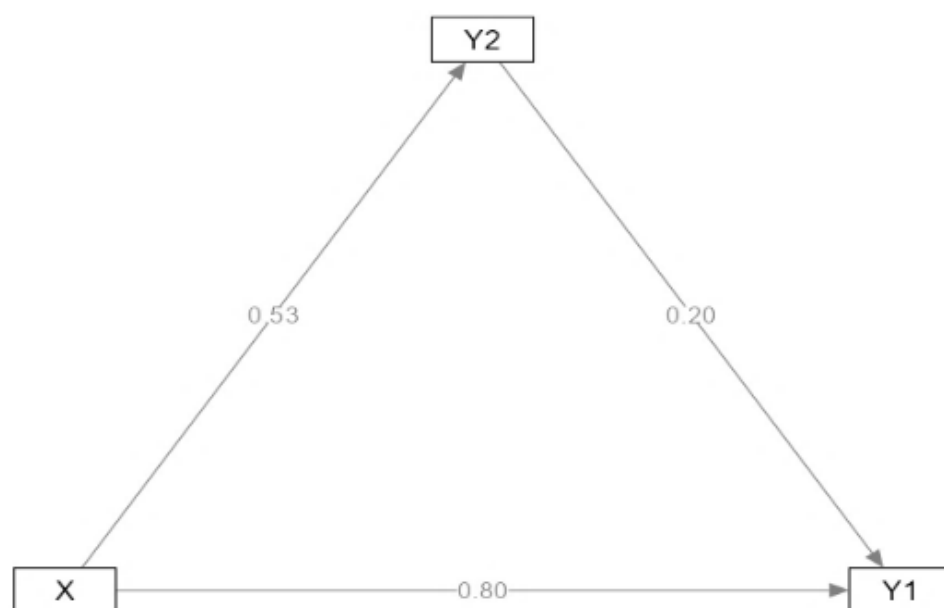


Figure 1. Path Diagram of the Mediation Model of Father's Presence, Religiosity, and Mental Health of College Students

Table 6 presents the results of the Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) analysis, indicating that all research constructs Father's presence, religiosity, and mental health have valid and reliable indicators. The strongest indicator for the Father's presence is perceptions of father involvement, highlighting the importance of emotional engagement, attention, and direct participation of fathers in their children's lives. Feelings about fathers also reflect positive emotional closeness, and indicators of physical relationships continue to be significant. Conversely, indicators of perceptions of father influence have a smaller role, suggesting children do not always see their fathers as dominant figures in decision-making. For religiosity, the leading indicator is personal religious practices, followed by spiritual experiences and religious beliefs, showing that students' religiosity manifests more through inner experiences and personal practices than through public activities or religious organizations.

The mental health construct is primarily represented by psychological well-being, then social and emotional well-being. This indicates that college students' mental health mainly manifests in their sense of purpose, psychological functioning, and social connections. The analysis of relationships among the latent constructs revealed significant and strong results. These findings demonstrate that Father's presence impacts college students' mental health both directly and indirectly via religiosity.

Table 7. Moderation Results: Father's presence × Religiosity Interaction

Variables	Estimate	P	Interpretation
Father's presence	0.395	< 0.001	Father's presence has a positive impact on general mental health
Religiosity	0.247	< 0.001	High levels of religiosity improve mental health
Father's presence × Religiosity	0.00136	0.027	Religiosity strengthens the effect of Father's presence (significant moderator)

Table 8. Simple Slope Analysis

Religiosity Level	Estimate β	Interpretation
Low (-1 SD)	0.372	Father's presence remains positive, but weaker
Average	0.395	Moderate positive effect; father influence is stable
High (+1 SD)	0.418	Strongest effect; high religiosity strengthens father influence

Note. Interpretation: Religiosity functions as a moderator. Religious students perceive a stronger influence of Father's presence on mental health.

Simple slope analysis revealed that Father's presence positively and significantly influences students' mental health across all religiosity levels. At average religiosity, Father's presence positively correlates with mental health. For students with low religiosity, the positive impact persists but is weaker compared to those with medium or high religiosity. Conversely, among highly religious students, Father's presence has a stronger effect on mental health, suggesting that religiosity enhances the beneficial impact of father's presence. Overall, the results confirm religiosity as a moderator; while Father's presence consistently benefits students' mental health, its effect is most pronounced at high religiosity levels and less so at low levels.

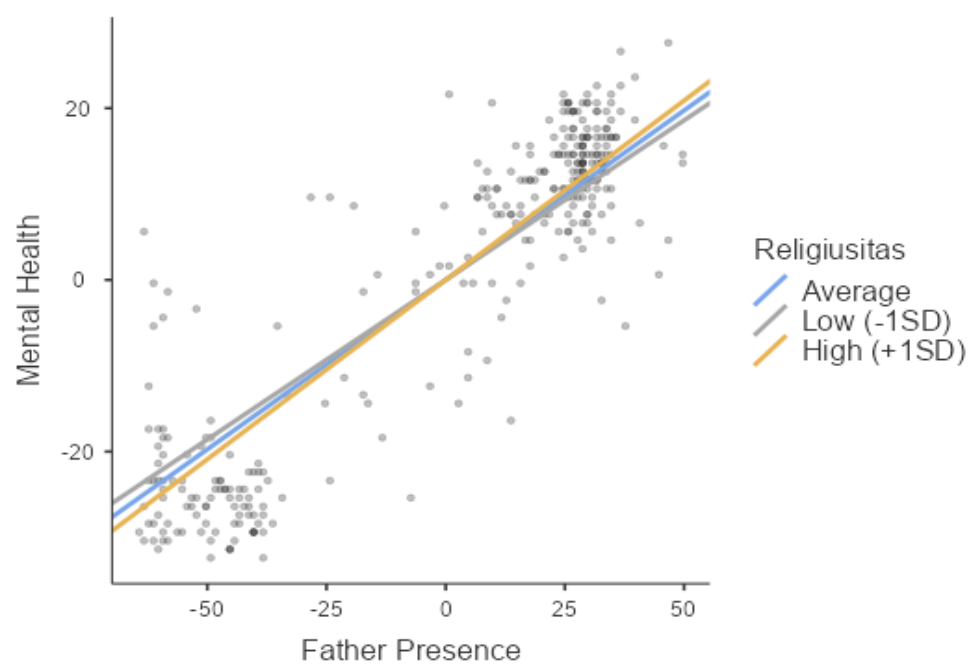


Figure 2. Simple Slope Plot of Moderation

The simple slope analysis results reveal that religiosity moderates the relationship between Father's presence and college students' mental health. The graph displays three positively sloped lines, suggesting that higher Father's presence correlates with better mental health. The blue line, representing students with average religiosity, shows that Father's presence positively influences mental health at moderate religiosity levels. The gray line, for students with low religiosity (-1 SD), indicates a positive but weaker effect of Father's presence compared to the other groups. The yellow line, for students with high religiosity (+1 SD), has the steepest slope, indicating the strongest impact on mental health. In summary, Father's presence generally benefits college students' mental health (Aaron et al., 2025), with effects most pronounced at higher religiosity levels and somewhat less at lower levels.

3.2 Discussion

The initial hypothesis proposed that a father's presence and religiosity significantly impact college students' mental health. Results confirmed that both factors simultaneously influence mental health, with a linear regression model indicating that these variables account for most of the variation, while other factors have a smaller effect. Notably, father's presence was a stronger predictor than religiosity. Students who perceived their father as warm, caring, and emotionally involved

generally experienced better mental health. Krampe & Newton, (2006) explained that father's presence encompasses not just physical proximity but also the feelings of being loved, cared for, and supported emotionally and psychologically. SEM findings support this, showing that fathers' emotional involvement and active participation most significantly influence students' perceptions. This affirms that a strong father's presence is vital for emotional, social, and spiritual development, as well as for fostering security and mental well-being.

This study shows that college students with a strong presence of their Father tend to find their lives meaningful, function well, and maintain positive social ties. This supports Hornby & Witte (2010), who argued that mental health issues in children and adolescents are affected by personal, family, and environmental risks but can be alleviated through solid parent relationships. Although 97% of college students reported low Father's presence, 75% were highly religious, which correlated with 59% being in the high mental health group.

Linear regression revealed that the combination of Father's presence and religiosity significantly explains college students' mental health. With an R-squared of 85%, these two factors account for most of the variation in mental health outcomes. Both variables positively and significantly impact mental health, with Father's presence exerting a greater effect than religiosity. Consequently, students with present fathers and high religiosity levels are more likely to have better mental health. These factors act as protective elements, enhancing their psychological resilience.

This result aligns with the meta-analysis by Forouhari et al. (2019), which found that higher religious orientation correlates with lower anxiety and depression levels among college students. Their research indicates that religiosity acts as a psychological safeguard, enhancing mental health by encouraging adaptive coping strategies, a sense of purpose, and emotional stability. Thus, students with greater father involvement and higher religiosity tend to maintain better mental health. Additional validation from Hapsari (2025) and Tirmidhi (2022) supports the idea that fathers are crucial in imparting moral and spiritual values. In the Quran, figures like Luqman and Prophet Ibrahim exemplify nurturing with compassion and wisdom. Conversely, lacking a father may increase risks of depression, loneliness, and anxiety (Zahrotun & Anwar, 2023).

Therefore, the first hypothesis is supported. Students with fathers who are actively involved and highly religious generally exhibit better mental health. The presence of the father and his religiosity act as protective factors that bolster students' psychological resilience and overall mental well-being (Aggarwal et al., 2023).

The second hypothesis suggests that religiosity serves as a mediator between the presence of the Father and college students' mental health. Supported by the structural model (Al-Natour et al., 2021), this indicates that the father's presence influences students' mental health indirectly through religiosity. Fathers who offer emotional warmth, spiritual guidance, and regular involvement are more likely to instill religious values in their children. These values help develop hope, a sense of meaning, inner peace, and resilience, ultimately improving psychological well-being.

This result aligns with Mahensa et al. (2022) who found that spirituality and family cohesion together support healthy lifestyles and psychological well-being in adolescents. Likewise, Metry et al. (2025) showed that a belief in God acts as a protective factor against depression, anxiety, and stress by enhancing hope, resilience, and purpose in life. These findings are especially relevant considering the high rates of depression and anxiety among university students worldwide, which range from 31% to 39% (Auerbach et al., 2018; Li et al., 2022). Overall, this evidence indicates that religiosity is a vital psychological resource for safeguarding students' mental health.

The analysis revealed that most participants were highly religious (74.8%), with 11.2% identified as religious and 13.9% as non-religious. This suggests that religious beliefs and practices are prominent within the study group, which could explain why religiosity acted as a key mediating factor. As Huber & Huber (2012) describe, religiosity involves the importance of religion in a person's life, affecting thoughts, feelings, values, and actions. It extends beyond rituals to include ideological beliefs, intellectual comprehension, religious practices in private and public settings, and personal spiritual experiences. People who consider religion central are more likely to view stressful events through a spiritual lens and base their decisions on faith-driven values (Bukhori, B., 2022). These traits may enhance emotional regulation, adaptive coping strategies, and psychological resilience.

From a psychological standpoint, these results reinforce Pargament (1997) religious coping theory, which suggests that religiosity acts as a meaning-making framework. It helps individuals turn stressful situations into opportunities for spiritual development. Fathers who consistently demonstrate religious values through worship, moral conduct, patience, and self-control serve as crucial spiritual role models for their children. As a result, a father's presence supports students' mental

health not only by offering emotional support but also by promoting religious beliefs and coping strategies that enhance resilience and overall psychological well-being.

These findings are consistent with Zahrotun & Anwar (2023), who highlighted fathers' spiritual duties based on *maqasid* sharia, especially *hifzh ad-din* (preserving religion) and *hifzh an-nasl* (preserving offspring). In this view, fathers should support their children's spiritual and emotional growth through religious education, moral leadership, and loving care. This involvement helps children internalize religious values, which in turn promotes better mental health.

The descriptive findings showed that most students reported fairly good mental health even though they perceived low Father's presence. This suggests that limited paternal involvement does not necessarily lead to poorer psychological well-being, as other protective factors may compensate for it. In this study, religiosity seems to serve as one such resource, offering meaning in life, emotional comfort, hope, and adaptive coping mechanisms. This aligns with the structural model, which indicates that religiosity mediates the link between Father's presence and students' mental health.

The observation that nearly all participants reported low Father's presence should be viewed with caution. While this pattern could indicate measurement bias, the Father's Presence Scale showed good psychometric properties (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.986$, validity evidence included if available), implying that the pattern likely reflects the study population rather than flaws in the instrument. Cultural norms about paternal involvement might also affect how students perceive Father's presence. Consequently, future research should evaluate the cultural relevance and cutoff points of the Father's Presence Scale across more diverse Indonesian groups. Overall, the findings affirm that religiosity acts as a key mediator between Father's presence and students' mental health. Fathers offering emotional support and spiritual guidance help foster religious values that enhance resilience, support psychological well-being, and enable students to face challenges with more hope, purpose, and emotional balance.

Hypothesis Three: Religiosity Moderates the Relationship between Father's Presence and College Students' Mental Health

This study shows that religiosity influences how a father's presence impacts college students' mental health. Specifically, the beneficial effect of having an involved father is more pronounced in students with higher religiosity. Students perceiving more paternal presence often report better mental health, and this connection is intensified when they also hold strong religious beliefs and engage in practices. These results imply that religiosity not only has a direct positive effect on mental health but also enhances the psychological advantages of a supportive father-child relationship. This finding reinforces the idea of a spiritual buffering mechanism, where religiosity acts as a psychological resource that amplifies the protective impact of positive relationships with fathers. Students with higher levels of religiosity tend to view their father's care, guidance, and emotional support through religious values like gratitude, life meaning, trust in God, and positive religious coping. As a result, they are more adept at managing their emotions, staying hopeful, and maintaining psychological well-being amidst academic and personal stressors.

This interpretation aligns with Pond (2022), who argued that religiosity influences how mental health risk factors affect paternal involvement. The research showed that fathers with higher religious dedication were more likely to stay affectionate, emotionally engaged, and actively involved with their children, even when facing psychological challenges such as depression and traumatic childhood experiences. Religiosity also mitigated the harmful impact of these risks by encouraging fathers to uphold supportive parenting and emotional connection. These results imply that religious beliefs can improve father-child relationship quality and bolster their protective psychological roles. Though Pond (2022) study focused on fathers rather than college students, it offers a solid theoretical basis for understanding how religiosity can amplify the positive effects of father presence on college students' mental health throughout different stages of development. The findings are further reinforced by a meta-analysis by Forouhari et al. (2019), which reviewed 13 studies with 5,620 college students. It found that greater religious orientation consistently correlates with lower anxiety and depression levels. Their results suggest that religiosity acts as a key psychological resource, fostering meaning in life, adaptive coping, hope, and emotional regulation. According to (Keyes, 2005) mental health model, these resources support emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Consequently, students with higher religiosity can better convert paternal support into positive psychological functioning, leading to improved mental health.

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AI Declaration

This article is the original work of the author without using AI-tools for writing sentences and/or creating/editing tables and figures in this manuscript.

Author Contributions

Multahada conceptualized the study, developed the methodology, conducted the investigation, data curation, formal analysis, validation, and project administration, managed resources, and prepared and edited the manuscript. Wina Fitriyah contributed to the investigation, project administration, resources, and supervision. Ruhyat contributed to funding acquisition, resources, methodology support, proofreading, and manuscript review and editing. Khoiriyah contributed to project administration, resources, validation, and supervision. Asyanti provided academic guidance, supported manuscript preparation, facilitated journal submission requirements, and reviewed and refined the manuscript. All authors approved the final version of the manuscript.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Data availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Research Limitations

This study has several limitations. Its cross-sectional design restricts causal conclusions; hence, longitudinal studies are necessary. Relying on self-reports may introduce social bias, so employing mixed methods or peer reports is advisable. The sample consisted solely of university students in Indonesia's religious cultural context, which limits generalizability; cross-cultural research is recommended. Additionally, the study only examined paternal presence as a family support factor; future work could include other variables like maternal warmth or family cohesion.

Finally, religiosity was only assessed at the individual level; future research might investigate communal religiosity and spiritual support.

Practical Implications / Suggestions

The findings indicate that universities should create mental health promotion programs involving families, especially fathers, while also bolstering students' positive spiritual and religious resources. Family-focused interventions that promote fathers' emotional engagement and open communication might enhance students' psychological health. Additionally, campus counselling services could incorporate culturally sensitive spiritual or religious approaches into preventive mental health initiatives. Future research should consider longitudinal and cross-cultural methods, include more varied populations, and further assess the cultural suitability of the Father's Presence Scale along with other family-related factors like maternal warmth, family cohesion, and communal religiosity.

4. Conclusion

This research shows that a father's presence and religiosity are key protective factors linked to the mental health of college students. The father's presence has a more direct impact on mental health than religiosity. Additionally, religiosity acts as both a mediator and a moderator. As a mediator, it explains how the father's presence improves mental health by fostering religious values and adaptive coping strategies. As a moderator, religiosity enhances the positive effect of paternal presence on mental health, suggesting that students with higher religiosity benefit more from their father's involvement. These results emphasize that emotional support from fathers combined with strong religious beliefs jointly support psychological well-being, resilience, life purpose, and adaptive coping in college students.

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