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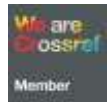
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Article

Sexual violence among college students in East Java: patterns, gender perspectives, and implications for prevention

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ABSTRACT

Sexual violence among university students is a critical issue that demands serious attention, especially in the East Java region. This study aims to explore the prevalence, patterns, and gender perspectives of sexual violence while offering recommendations for prevention efforts. Using a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional survey design, data were collected from 155 undergraduate students from various universities in East Java, selected through random assignment. A sexual violence instrument measured verbal, physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. Descriptive statistical analysis was employed to examine the data. The findings reveal that 56.8% of respondents reported experiencing sexual violence, while 43.2% did not. Verbal abuse emerged as the most prevalent form of violence (40.6%), followed by emotional abuse (32.9%), unwanted sexual behavior (20.6%), and physical abuse (20%). Gender-based analysis highlighted distinct patterns: female respondents reported higher rates of verbal abuse (43.4%) compared to males (26.9%), whereas male respondents experienced more physical abuse (30.8%) than females (17.8%). The study also suggests potential underreporting and a lack of awareness regarding certain forms of sexual violence. These findings underscore the urgent need for gender education, awareness campaigns, and campus policies that foster safe and inclusive environments. Collaboration among educational institutions, government bodies, and communities is essential to design evidence-based interventions to prevent sexual violence among university students.

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Introduction

Sexual violence is a serious problem around the world, including Indonesia. Sexual violence includes a range of behaviors such as attempted or completed rape, sexual coercion, unwanted contact, and unwanted experiences without contact such as harassment (Fitz-Gibbon; Towl & Walker, 2019). Sexual harassment can take many forms, ranging from a kind of voyeurism, through sexual talk and touch, to sexual intercourse (Crosthwaite & Priest, 1996; Narindrani, 2021). Sexual violence can target anyone, both men and women, adults and children.

Sexual violence encompasses a range of non-consensual behaviors, including sexual harassment, assault, and coercion, which can occur in various settings, including educational institutions. Sexual harassment, a subset of sexual violence, involves unsolicited and unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature (Berdahl & Raver, 2011; Cantalupo & Kidder, 2018; Larbi, 2020).

Globally, sexual violence is a pervasive issue, with higher education institutions being no exception. In Indonesia, the prevalence of sexual violence within universities has garnered increasing attention. A study analyzing student perceptions at an Indonesian university revealed that sexual violence on campuses is often underreported, with many incidents remaining hidden due to cultural taboos and fear of stigma (K. E. McGregor, 2023; Narindrani, 2021; Wismayanti, 2020).

In the Indonesian university context, sexual violence significantly impacts students' well-being and academic performance. The Indonesian Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection reported a rise in sexual violence cases in educational settings, with universities accounting for a substantial proportion of these incidents (Rahman & Maulana, 2024; Rumble, 2020) . Additionally, a Human Rights Watch report highlighted a culture of impunity contributing to the persistence of sexual harassment in Indonesian universities (Chinkin, 2017; Ouattara., 1998).

Nowadays, sexual violence does not only occur in the real world, but also in cyberspace. A Pew Research Center study in 2021 found that 41% of Americans have experienced online harassment, and half of those indicated that they believed they were targeted because of their political beliefs. Additionally, a growing number of people are experiencing more severe online harassment such as sexual harassment or stalking. The same study found that the percentage of women who reported experiencing sexual harassment online doubled from 8% to 16% in 4 years.1 Some of this behavior can be attributed to the anonymity provided by the Internet. People often feel emboldened to act inappropriately when they will not be identified or face consequences for their actions. Such abusive behavior can also be influenced by the toxic culture that has long developed around online gaming and social media in general (Wiederhold, 2022).

Various forms of sexual violence also target not only adults, but also children. Sexual violence against children is currently rampant and this phenomenon urges many parties including all levels of society involved in the vulnerability of victims of sexual crimes against children to reduce the increasing number of sexual violence. Based on UNICEF global data 2023, states in more than a third of countries, at least 5 percent of young women reported experiences of sexual violence in childhood, while the rate was lower among men in each country (Organization, 2023). Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection records show that cases of child sexual violence in Indonesia reached 9,588 cases in 2022. This number increased from the previous year, which was 4,162 cases. This shows that Indonesia is in an emergency situation of sexual violence against children (Kurniasari, 2016). The most common label for people who sexually abuse children is " pedophile" (Jahnke, 2022; Probosiwi, R., & Bahransyaf, 2015).

Sexual harassment is defined as an unsolicited, unwanted, and unrequited sexual advance from one person to obtain unwanted sexual favors from another (Aji, 2024; Ramushweu, 2023). It includes all forms of inappropriate sexual advances, unwanted sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, as well as unsubtle and subtle behaviors (Aji, 2024; Berdahl & Raver, 2011; Crosthwaite & Priest, 1996).

Based on data from Komnas Perempuan, universities rank first for sexual violence in the educational environment with 35 cases from 2015 to 2021. Sexual violence in the realm of higher education is a serious issue that can affect the quality of education and student welfare. Data shows that sexual violence on campus is often hidden and unreported, creating an unsafe environment and damaging the academic climate. Various factors contribute to the persistence of sexual violence in higher education, such as low personal awareness, social stigma, and lack of institutional support. Universities often face challenges in dealing with these cases effectively. Complicated reporting procedures, lack of training for staff, and inconsistent policies can aggravate the situation of victims. On the other hand, some universities have begun to take proactive steps to address the issue, including providing counseling services, increasing education on sexual violence, and tightening policies and procedures for handling cases. The data shows that there are 67 perpetrators, ranging from 28 people who work as teachers, 15 people as lecturers, 10 students, 9 school principals, 2 trainers, and 3 others. Meanwhile, the results of research conducted at Beijing University, China show

that 78.56% of students recognize all sexual harassment behavior, and 11.58% feel angry at all sexual harassment behavior. Male students felt more angry about same-sex harassment than female students (p <.001). Overall, the students were aware of about 3 out of 13 sexual harassment interventions. None of the three intervention strategies were significantly associated with perceptions of sexual harassment (p > .050) (He, 2024).

Various cases of sexual violence are deemed necessary for early sexual education. In addition to sexual violence such as rape, child marriage at an early age is also an act of sexual violence (Fitz-Gibbon; Rumble, 2020; Towl & Walker, 2019). The Secretary General of the Indonesian Women's Coalition, said that there are still many cases of parents marrying off their children who are still 10 years old. " Children are forced to have sex, forced to mature prematurely, lose playtime, and lose learning opportunities." (Hedin, 2000; Rumble, 2020). Early marriage has also been reported and trending among adolescent girls to varying degrees in various countries, especially in developing countries such as Indonesia, Egypt, Pakistan, Turkey, Vietnam, India, Bangladesh, and countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (Elnakib, 2022; Malhotra & Elnakib, 2021; Retnowulandari, 2024). This is closely related to pedophilia.

Pedophilia is the tendency of adults to sexually abuse children more than their own age. Pedophiles are those whose sexual desires and fantasies for pre-adolescent children cause suffering or interpersonal difficulties (Association, 2013).The immoral act is carried out by the perpetrator intentionally to the victim (child) (Haskell & Randall, 2019). Cases of sexual abuse against minors are a problem that needs special attention so that minors do not become psychologically traumatized which can damage their psyche and personality, especially the rise of pedophilia cases which are very detrimental to victims such as Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)(Narindrani, 2021; Sari, 2022).

Cases of sexual violence against child victims of pedophiles, even a number of cases of rape against children continue to be revealed. This condition also strengthens the assumption that Indonesia is indeed in a sexual violence emergency situation. Apart from sexual violence against children, the rape rate in this country is also relatively high (K. McGregor, 2023; K. E. McGregor, 2023). Various impacts will arise from victims of sexual crimes or violence.

First, the psychological impact of victims of sexual violence and harassment will experience deep trauma, in addition to the stress experienced by victims can interfere with brain function and development (Haskell & Randall, 2019; SARI, 2022). Second, the physical impact. Child sexual violence and abuse is a major factor in the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) (Hammerschlag, 1998). In addition, the victim also has the potential for internal injuries and bleeding. In severe cases, internal organ damage may occur.

Such conditions will cause psychological effects in the form of behavioral disorders ranging from excessive anxiety, irritability, sleeplessness, stress and many other reactions. Post-traumatic stress disorder is a syndrome in which a person has experienced a traumatic event. PTSD is a syndrome of anxiety, autonomic lability, emotional invulnerability and flashbacks of extremely painful experiences after physical or emotional stress that exceeds the limits of ordinary people's endurance (Alix и др., 2017). PTSD usually affects girls more often because they are more sensitive to change and thus experience more intense emotions (Bahri, 2007; Theresia, G. N., & Wijaya, 2020; Williams & Poijula, 2016). Previous studies have shown inconsistent results.

In some cases, it can lead to death (Bahri, 2007; Theresia, G. N., & Wijaya, 2020; Williams & Poijula, 2016). third, the social impact. Victims of sexual violence and harassment are often ostracized in social life, which should be avoided because victims certainly need motivation and moral support in order to get back on their feet in life (Al-Maharma et al, 2019). One of the main causes of the increase in sexual violence cases is the easier access to pornography in cyberspace.

Despite the recognition of sexual violence as a critical issue, there remains a gap in research specifically focusing on university students in East Java Province. Previous studies have often addressed sexual violence in broader terms or concentrated on different demographics, leaving the

experiences of East Javanese university students underexplored. This study aims to fill this gap by identifying the forms and prevalence of sexual violence among university students in East Java. By concentrating on this specific population, the research seeks to provide insights that can inform targeted interventions and policies to effectively address and prevent sexual violence within East Javanese universities. In summary, while sexual violence is a global concern, its manifestation within Indonesian universities, particularly in East Java, requires focused investigation. This study endeavors to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by shedding light on the specific experiences of university students in this region, thereby aiding in the development of effective preventive measures and support systems.

Methods

Procedure

This study employs quantitative research methods, using a cross-sectional survey design to collect and analyze data. The data were analyzed with descriptive statistics to evaluate the value of each variable measured within its grouping. A cross-sectional design is a research approach that examines risks and effects through observation and aims to collect data simultaneously or at a single point in time (Mann, 2003; Morrisan, 2012; Muhammad., 2023; Wang & Cheng, 2020).

The sampling technique employed was Random Assignment. This technique involves randomly selecting participants or research subjects from various universities in the district/city area. Each participant or respondent has an equal opportunity to be included in the research sample (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Levy & Lemeshow, 2013; Lohr, 2021). This approach is intended to increase the sample size and enhance the complexity of the data obtained.

Data collection was conducted using a sexual violence instrument. The instrument measures indicators such as Verbal Abuse, Physical Abuse, Sexual Abuse, and Emotional Abuse. It was designed and distributed online, with instructions provided at the beginning to guide participants in completing the instrument.

Instrumentation

The data collection was carried out using a sexual violence instrument designed to assess various forms of abuse. This instrument measures the following indicators: Verbal Abuse, Physical Abuse, Sexual Abuse, and Emotional Abuse.

The development of the instrument involved a thorough process to ensure its validity and reliability. The tool was designed based on expert input and existing literature on sexual violence, and its validation was carried out through pilot testing with a small group of participants. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, yielding satisfactory results.

The instrument consists of multiple items designed to assess each type of abuse. Respondents are asked to indicate the frequency of each experience using a Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Never) to 4 (Always). Examples of survey items include: (1) "My body parts were insulted by referring to them as a bad sexual object, done deliberately to degrade and hurt my feelings (e.g., tepos, montok, sunade, etc.) (verbal violence)"; (2) "I have experienced being hit or pushed on my chest and genitals. (physical violence)"; (3) "I was forced to kiss or engage in other physical contact that I did not want. (sexual violence)"; (1) "I am afraid of being told that I don't care if I refuse to kiss or engage in other physical contact. (emotional violence)"

Participants

The participants of this study were undergraduate students from various universities (both public and private) in East Java Province. A total of 155 respondents participated in the study, with 26 male and 129 female respondents. The demographic breakdown of the regional representation is as follows: Surabaya city/district: 23.4%, Sidoarjo: 19.2%, Gresik: 6.3%, Tuban: 9.1%, Kediri: 5.2%, Nganjuk: 9.5%, Lamongan: 3.3%, Bojonegoro: 3.9%, Mojokerto: 3.3%, Madiun: 2%, Tulungagung: 2%,

Ngawi: 2%, Magetan: 2%, Malang: 1.3%, Pamekasan: 1.3%, Situbondo: 1.3%, Ponorogo: 1.3%, Jombang: 2%, Blitar: 1.3%, Banyuwangi: 1.3%, Probolinggo: 1.3%

The participants were recruited using the Random Assignment technique, which involves randomly selecting individuals from a variety of universities within the district/city areas of East Java. This method ensures that each participant had an equal chance of being selected to be part of the research sample (Creswell, 2017; Drummond & Murphey-Retes, 2017, in Isnawan, 2020). The goal was to increase the diversity and complexity of the sample to obtain more comprehensive and varied data.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the participants were analyzed using statistical methods to draw meaningful conclusions. Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize and describe the key features of the data (Mertler, 2021; Pollock, 2023). These included calculating frequencies, percentages, and mean scores for the various indicators of sexual violence, such as Verbal Abuse, Physical Abuse, Sexual Abuse, and Emotional Abuse.

The analysis was conducted using SPSS software (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), a widely-used tool for statistical analysis. The following steps were taken to analyze the data: (1) Descriptive Statistics: This was used to compute the frequency distributions for each of the survey items related to the indicators of sexual violence. These statistics helped to understand the distribution of responses and the overall patterns in the data; (2) Reliability Testing: Cronbach's Alpha was used to assess the internal consistency of the instrument, ensuring that the items within each indicator (e.g., Verbal Abuse, Physical Abuse) were reliable and consistent; (3) Frequency Distribution: The frequency and percentage of responses for each item were calculated to determine how often participants reported experiencing different forms of sexual violence. This helped in identifying common trends and areas that might require further attention or intervention; (4) Cross-tabulation: This technique was used to explore the relationship between demosgraphic variables (such as gender and regional representation) and the types of abuse experienced by participants. Cross-tabulation allowed for examining patterns in the data, helping to identify if there were any significant differences based on these factors.

These statistical methods were chosen to provide a comprehensive understanding of the data and to ensure that the findings are both reliable and valid. The results were interpreted to determine the prevalence of each form of abuse and to analyze how demographic factors influenced participants' experiences.

Results and Discussion

This study employed descriptive frequency analysis to examine the prevalence and types of sexual violence experienced by university students in East Java. The findings are presented narratively, organized into key sections to facilitate understanding.

Overall Prevalence of Sexual Violence

Among the 155 respondents, a significant proportion reported experiencing sexual violence. Specifically, 56.8% indicated they had encountered sexual violence at some point, while 43.2% reported never having such experiences.

Breakdown by Type of Sexual Violence

The study identified several forms of sexual violence: Verbal Sexual Violence (Verbal Abuse): Approximately 40.6% of respondents reported having experienced verbal sexual violence, with 58.7% indicating they had never encountered this form. Physical Sexual Violence (Physical Abuse): About 20% of participants had experienced physical sexual violence, while 80% had not. Unwanted Sexual Behavior (Sexual Abuse): Approximately 20.6% of respondents reported experiencing unwanted sexual behavior, with 79.4% indicating they had never encountered this form. Emotional Sexual

Violence (Emotional Abuse): Around 32.9% of participants had experienced emotional sexual violence, while 67.1% had not.

Gender-Based Analysis
The study also examined the experiences of sexual violence across genders: Verbal Sexual Violence: Among female respondents, 43.4% had experienced verbal sexual violence, compared to 26.9% of male respondents. Physical Sexual Violence: 17.8% of female respondents reported experiencing physical sexual violence, while 30.8% of male respondents had encountered this form. Unwanted Sexual Behavior: 20.9% of female respondents had experienced unwanted sexual behavior, compared to 19.2% of male respondents. Emotional Sexual Violence: 32.6% of female respondents had experienced emotional sexual violence, while 34.6% of male respondents had encountered this form.

Summary of Key Trends
The analysis reveals several notable trends: High Prevalence of Verbal Sexual Violence: Verbal sexual violence emerged as the most prevalent form, affecting 40.6% of respondents. Gender Differences: While both genders reported experiences of sexual violence, the types and frequencies varied. For instance, a higher percentage of female respondents reported verbal sexual violence, whereas a higher percentage of male respondents reported physical sexual violence. Underreporting: Despite the significant prevalence, a substantial portion of respondents had never encountered certain forms of sexual violence, suggesting potential underreporting or lack of awareness.

Discussion
Sexual violence remains a critical issue within university settings, with research indicating its prevalence even at the tertiary level. A 2019 study by the Association of American Universities (AAU) found that approximately 26.4% of female students encountered various forms of sexual harassment during their academic tenure. These incidents ranged from unwanted physical contact and sexual comments to coercion into sexual activities. In Indonesia, while sexual violence cases are prevalent, many instances go unreported due to a lack of accessible reporting mechanisms and societal stigma. A report by Komnas Perempuan in 2020 highlighted that numerous higher education institutions lack clear and easily accessible reporting channels for victims.

Globally, the issue persists. In the United States, the AAU's 2019 study revealed that about 13% of university students reported experiencing sexual violence during their studies. Similarly, a report from the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) indicated that around 25% of female students had encountered some form of sexual harassment since the age of 15 (against Women, 2014). These statistics underscore the widespread nature of sexual violence in academic environments.

Addressing this issue necessitates universities implementing clear and effective policies, including educational programs on sexual harassment awareness and prevention, support services for victims, and accessible reporting mechanisms. Equally important is ensuring a fair and transparent law enforcement process to handle such cases appropriately.

Research by Newlands in 2016 indicates that nearly 20% of female college students in the United States have experienced rape or attempted rape (Newlands & O'Donohue, 2016). The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reports that sexual violence, including rape, is among the most frequently reported forms of violence to authorities in many countries, highlighting its significant impact on victims' physical, mental, and emotional health. Strategic and comprehensive preventive efforts must begin with educating individuals about the forms, impacts, and dangers of sexual violence at various levels of society. In Japan, concerns about pornography surged at the beginning of the decade, with conservative groups and the media calling for government action to curb explicit content, such as manga aimed at children (Hambleton, 2019; Yang & Xu, 2016). This reflects a broader global awareness and response to sexual violence and exploitation.

Studies consistently show that sexual violence predominantly affects women and children. Komnas Perempuan reported 431,471 cases of violence against women, indicating a significant increase over the past five years (Noer et.al, 2021; Perempuan, 2020). This data is based on reported

cases, and many victims may be reluctant to report due to fear, embarrassment, or feelings of helplessness. Children's limited ability to communicate with adults about violence and their understanding of sexuality make them particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse (Berliner & Elliott, 2002). The high rate of sexual violence against children leads to various negative impacts, both physiological and psychological. Mental health disorders are twice as likely to occur in children who experience sexual abuse (Conte & Schuerman, 1987).

Research indicates that the majority of sexual violence victims are female, with a percentage of 83.2%. This significant number requires immediate attention. Violence against women is not only an individual or national problem but has become a global and even transnational issue. Often, violence against women is attributed to views of women as weak or to patriarchal structures. Patriarchal culture positions men as powerful and tends to grant them discretion over women, exacerbating the situation when the victim is female (Becker, 1999; Stark, 2007). This can lead to women being considered the guilty party in incidents of sexual harassment. Additionally, the lack of education about sexual harassment and victims' rights further exacerbates the situation. Many students do not even realize that they are victims of sexual harassment. Therefore, education about the forms or types of sexual harassment, their impact, and prevention is crucial.

The study found that 40.6% of respondents experienced verbal sexual violence, including verbal comments, jokes, pornography, ridicule, whistling, or catcalling (Ahmed et.al, 2019). Verbal harassment, such as catcalling, is prevalent in Indonesia and is influenced by gender inequality in interactions between men and women. This inequality arises from placing one gender as more dominant than the other in Indonesian society. Regarding physical harassment, 20% of respondents had experienced unwanted touches in certain areas, squeezing, hugging, or kissing. The data showed that 17.8% of female respondents and 30.8% of male respondents had experienced physical abuse. This aligns with research indicating that 25% of victims of sexual violence have experienced unwanted physical abuse such as being touched, massaged, squeezed, hugged, or kissed. Contributing factors include natural instincts between women and men, power relations in hierarchical structures, gender inequality, and the condition of minority groups. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), one in three women worldwide experiences physical sexual violence by an intimate partner during their lifetime, leading to various negative impacts such as psychological and physical health problems and behavioral disorders in victims(Harper & Bartels, 2017; Hedin, 2000).

The study also examined emotional sexual abuse, with 32.9% of respondents having experienced it. This includes the fear of not being loved, being demeaned, or being considered sanctimonious if they do not serve the sexual desires of the abuser. Notably, 34.6% of male respondents and 32.6% of female respondents experienced emotional sexual violence. This finding challenges stereotypes about gender and emotional responses, indicating that both male and female students are equally susceptible to emotional sexual abuse.

Overall, more than half of all respondents (56.8%) have experienced sexual violence. When examined by gender, 58.1% of female respondents and 50% of male respondents reported experiencing sexual violence. This high number requires special attention and immediate follow-up. The varied gender of victims in this research data can enrich the search for comprehensive and effective solutions. While girls are often targeted by sexual offenders, many cases of violence against women are still widely reported by various studies (Chinkin, 2017), and sexual violence against women remains prevalent. Awareness of the dangers of sexual violence against women still needs to be increased. This study acknowledges that sexual violence against women exists, especially at the undergraduate level.

Conclusion

This study underscores the urgent need to address sexual violence within university settings. The findings reveal that 40.6% of respondents experienced verbal sexual violence, 20% encountered physical sexual violence, and 32.9% suffered emotional sexual abuse. Notably, 30.8% of male

respondents reported experiencing physical sexual violence, highlighting that men are also significantly affected by sexual violence. These forms of violence lead to traumatic, psychological, and physiological impacts that can disrupt daily life and threaten the future of victims. Preventive measures are essential and should be implemented through socialization efforts aimed at preventing and combating all types of sexual violence across all levels of society—from children to adults, and across all educational stages, from elementary school to university. Additionally, universities must enhance their support systems to provide mental and emotional support to all students. Improving law enforcement within higher education institutions is also crucial to effectively address and prevent sexual violence on campus.

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