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Gender Equality and Justice in Education: A Psychological Study of Victims of Sexual Violence in Educational Environment

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the forms of sexual violence, causative factors, impacts, and prevention efforts in the school environment based on gender equality and justice, with a focus on the psychological study of victims. This study uses a qualitative approach with the library research method. The data sources used in this study are primary data in the form of books, journals, and relevant research reports on gender equality and justice, sexual violence in schools, and psychological aspects of victims. Meanwhile, secondary data is taken from articles, news, and data from government agencies. The results of the study show that (1) various forms of sexual violence that occur in the educational environment, are often a manifestation of deep gender inequality in society (2) the main causative factors of sexual violence in the educational environment are influenced by the dominance of power and the patriarchal system in educational institutions (3) the psychological impact experienced by victims of sexual violence includes psychological trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, behavioral problems, impaired emotional and social development, and the risk of health problems. Prevention efforts in this study recommend the need for comprehensive prevention policies and programs to create a safe and equitable learning environment, as well as the importance of evaluating educational materials that may be gender-biased.

Keywords: *Gender, Sexual Violence, Education, Psychological*

Introduction

Gender equality and justice in education remain serious issues, particularly regarding sexual violence in schools (Manalu et al., 2024). Sexual violence reflects deep-rooted gender inequality, where social and cultural norms reinforce male dominance and weaken vulnerable groups (Kholil & Budiantoro, 2022). As a result, educational environments that should be safe spaces for students have increasingly become sites where sexual violence occurs and is often overlooked.

According to data from the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (KemenPPPA), cases of violence against children increased from 11,057 in 2019 to 11,278 in 2020, and rose sharply to 16,106 in 2022, with sexual violence as the most dominant type at 9,588 cases. The Ministry also recorded 37 cases of violence in Islamic boarding schools, mostly involving sexual violence. At the higher education level, 49 cases of sexual violence were reported to the Ministry of Education and Culture's PPKS Working Group in 2022, and universities recorded the highest number of cases during 2015–2021 (Komnas Perempuan, 2021). These data highlight the widespread threat of sexual violence in educational settings, particularly against girls, and reflect persistent gender inequalities in protection and safety.

Numerous studies have examined gender equality and justice in education. Several focus on gender equality in education from an Islamic perspective (Kartika, 2020; Akip, 2020; Luqman Hakim, 2023), while others analyze Indonesian government policies on gender equality in education (Ali Roziqin et al., 2019; Rina Haslita et al., 2021; Gusti Rahma Sari & Ecep Ismail, 2021; Dhepita Septiyani et al., 2024). Additional research addresses forms of gender inequality in educational settings (Faizal Kurniawan & Yuli Kusumaningtyas, 2022; Dika Dona Syahputra et al., 2023; Atikatul Hulaipah et al., 2024). However, these studies have not specifically examined sexual violence in education as a form of gender injustice, nor have they explored gender equality and justice through psychological analyses of victims of sexual violence in educational environments.

This study aims to address existing gaps by examining forms of sexual violence, contributing factors, impacts, and prevention efforts through a psychological perspective. It seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the conditions and needs of girls in educational settings to support the creation of safe and equitable learning environments. By exploring how gender inequality contributes to rising cases of sexual violence in education, this study is expected to inform the development of comprehensive policies and prevention programs in schools.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using library research. According to Creswell (2018), qualitative research aims to describe, explore, and understand individuals' experiences or perspectives on a phenomenon. This study explores gender equality and justice, sexual violence in schools, and the psychological aspects of victims through literature analysis. Two types of data are used: primary data, including books, journals, and research reports on these topics, and secondary data from articles, news, and government sources such as Komnas Perempuan and the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (KemenPPPA).

Result and Discussion

The Phenomenon of Gender-Based Sexual Violence Cases in Education

Sexual violence, defined by Komnas Perempuan as sexual acts through physical or non-physical contact targeting the victim's sexual organs or sphere (Jannah, 2021), often reflects social subordination where women are easy targets for those in power. This occurs frequently in educational settings, such as a student-on-student harassment case in Demak that went viral in September 2024, and a systematic teacher-perpetrated harassment involving 15 elementary students in Yogyakarta. At the higher education level, a master's alumna at the Islamic University of Riau was sexually harassed and coerced by the dean; although reported to the police, the case was closed due to the statute of limitations.

These cases illustrate ongoing gender inequality and discriminatory treatment, showing that sexual violence occurs across all educational levels. In schools, perpetrators are often peers or teachers, while in pesantren and universities, they hold authority that enables manipulation. The cases include Gender Harassment, involving actions or statements that demean based on gender (Anam et al., 2022), as in the Demak case where bias and objectification were normalized, and Sexual Coercion, involving pressure or threats to force sexual activity (Rahmasari, 2022), exemplified by a pesantren owner who abused his power to intimidate victims, prevent reporting, and cause severe trauma.

These cases show that sexual violence is mainly caused by power dominance and patriarchal systems in educational institutions (Nugraha & Subaidi, 2022; Fitri Pebriaisyah et al., 2022). Hierarchical positions create dependency and obedience, as seen when a dean at the Islamic University of Riau exploited his authority to promise career advancement. Patriarchal systems

reinforce male control, making women vulnerable (Fitri Pebriaisyah et al., 2022), as seen in pesantren cases where authority, student dependence, and victim-blaming norms allowed perpetrators to dominate, manipulate, and silence victims.

This is in accordance with the book "Psychology: Concepts and Applications" by Jeffrey S. Nevid (2021), which states that the underlying motive for rape is very complex. The motives include domination, revenge, anger, and willful cruelty mixed with sexual desire. For some perpetrators, the act is a means to control and dominate women, while for others, the act is a form of revenge for women's subjective experiences in the form of harassment and humiliation.

Sexual harassment is often used to dominate and control those in lower positions (Surahman, Sigit; Corneta Ingky; Senaharjanta, Liliek, 2020) and, within patriarchal systems, serves as social control that objectifies women and reinforces subordination (Elindawati, 2021). Perpetrators frequently normalize it as a "joke," as in the case of a dean at the Islamic University of Riau who claimed inviting the victim to a hotel was a test of integrity. This normalization discourages victims from reporting or resisting, while masking the perpetrator's true intentions and worsening the victim's trauma.

The Psychological Impact of Victims of Sexual Violence

Sexual harassment and violence can have several psychological impacts on victims (Harahap et al., 2024), including: 1) Psychological trauma, leaving deep emotional wounds and painful memories that affect processing of the experience; 2) Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), with symptoms like flashbacks, anxiety, and tension interfering with daily life; 3) Depression, characterized by sadness, loss of interest, and mood swings; 4) Emotional and social development disorders, leading to difficulties in relationships, trust, and emotion regulation; and 5) Increased risk of mental health disorders in adulthood, such as mood disorders, addiction, or self-harm, particularly when the victim was a minor.

Preventing Sexual Violence Through Gender Equality

Gender Inclusive Education

Gender-inclusive education is an approach that ensures all individuals, regardless of gender, have equal access to learning opportunities and are free from discrimination and stereotypes

(Pratiwi et al., 2020). This approach integrates gender awareness into all aspects of education, from curriculum design to classroom interactions, and is essential for preventing sexual violence in educational environments. By promoting fairness and equality, gender-inclusive education challenges biased norms and builds respectful relationships among students, reducing the risk of bullying, harassment, and other injustices (Herdiansyah, 2016; Wicaksana et al., 2020).

From a social psychology perspective, gender-inclusive education helps shape equitable social norms and reduce gender-based discrimination (Kusuma, 2021). It encourages students to view one another as equals, fostering healthy relationships, appreciation for diversity, and avoidance of exploitative or violent behavior. Additionally, inclusive environments support students' psychological well-being (Amahoru & Ahyani, 2023), boosting confidence and reducing stress, while providing crucial support for victims of sexual violence through respect, protection, and recognition.

Key features of gender-inclusive education include gender-sensitive curricula that challenge stereotypes, inclusive teaching methods that value diversity, and safe learning environments free from harassment or violence (Oktaviani et al., 2024). It also emphasizes the empowerment of all genders and the importance of teacher training to address bias effectively. The benefits are significant: it reduces gender inequality, promotes social equality, and prevents gender-based violence by instilling respect for all individuals (Rita Nofianti et al., 2024; Utama & Hutahaean, 2024). Overall, gender-inclusive education is a critical step in creating supportive, equitable learning environments where all students can reach their full potential without gender-based restrictions.

Child-Friendly School Program

The child-friendly school program is one of the strategic initiatives in creating an educational environment that is safe, inclusive and free from violence, including gender-based sexual violence (Latif, 2023). The program aims to guarantee children's rights, especially the right to protection, by building a school culture that respects diversity and instills gender equality values (Wardoyo et al., 2024). Through a holistic approach, the program not only focuses on preventing violence, but also equips students, teachers and parents with the knowledge and skills to recognize and report violence. One of the important steps in this program is the implementation of strict anti-violence policies, the implementation of age-based sexual education, and the involvement of students in

activities that strengthen empathy and respect for others (Antoni et al., 2024). In addition, the provision of safe spaces, confidential reporting mechanisms, and counseling services are also key components in creating a supportive environment.

One effective approach is the logical consequence strategy, which aims to foster awareness in students without using violence (Jestika, 2022). This strategy responds to student violations with consequences directly related to the offense, avoiding unrelated punishments (Wahyuni et al., 2023). For example, instead of shaving the hair of a santri who skips class—a punishment unrelated to the offense—the logical consequence would be assigning additional tasks equivalent to the time missed. Such strategies help minimize violence in education, aligning with sociological theories that link violence to individual aggressive behavior, which can escalate into broader collective violence (Bima, 2023).

Conclusion

Based on the research findings, sexual violence in educational settings is a manifestation of deep gender inequalities in society. These inequities create conditions in which sexual violence is more likely to occur and is often overlooked. Victims of sexual violence experience a range of serious psychological impacts, including trauma, anxiety and mental health disorders, which can continue into adulthood. Thus, sexual violence prevention efforts must involve gender-inclusive education, child-friendly school programs, and education on gender-based sexual violence. This is important to create a safe and equal environment for all students. This research also emphasizes the need to develop comprehensive prevention policies and programs to address sexual violence in schools, as well as the importance of monitoring and evaluating the implementation of these policies. It is hoped that this research can serve as a basis for more effective action in addressing the issue of sexual violence in educational settings. There is a need for further research that can delve deeper into the factors that contribute to sexual violence and how to create a safer and more equitable educational environment for girls.

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