

Victim Blaming in Society the Case of Sexual Violence Against Women in Banjarmasin

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Abstract

The increase in sexual violence against women is a phenomenon that requires special attention, especially since many victims of sexual violence are blamed by the community, which only focuses on finding fault with the victims. This study contributed to exploring in depth the community's perception of victim blaming, considering the differences in community views that perpetuate gender inequality. This study is a qualitative study with a descriptive phenomenological approach. The sample that reached data saturation in this study consisted of 12 participants obtained using purposive sampling with inclusion criteria of participants who knew about sexual violence, had a family experience with a case of sexual violence, and were victims of sexual violence. This study had previously obtained ethical approval number 111/KEPK-SI/VII/2025. The research instrument was the researcher herself, assisted by interview guidelines, recording equipment, informed consent forms, and field notes (systematic documentation). The data collection technique used semi-structured interviews with in-depth interview techniques. The data analysis technique used was manual thematic analysis. Results: this study produced five themes, namely negative stigma, coercion, resolution of violence, night workers and their risks, and frustration. The Women's Empowerment Agency, the violence task force, health workers, and educational institutions should launch public campaigns featuring stories from survivors of sexual violence to eliminate the stigma that a woman's clothing or occupation makes her deserving of harassment or sexual violence.

Keywords: Frustration; Sexual Violence; Stigma; Victim Blaming; Women

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1. Introduction

Blaming victims of sexual violence is still deeply rooted in society, known as *victim blaming* (Hayati et al., 2011). The increase in cases of sexual violence is inseparable from the courage of victims to seek justice and recovery. Cases of sexual violence in Banjarmasin City in 2023, consisted of 9 cases and increased to 39 cases. According to data from the Women's Empowerment and Child Protection Agency (DP3A) of Banjarmasin City, there were 47 cases of sexual violence in 2023, which is increased to 62 cases in 2024, and 34 cases of sexual violence against women from January to August, 2025. This is not unrelated to victim's courage to report cases of sexual violence that occur (Mansour et al., 2021).

Gender inequality and patriarchal culture in society often result in women being negatively labeled, particularly when they dress up or wear tight and revealing clothing, which is perceived as

provoking sexual violence (Alkan & Tekmanlı, 2021). Such stigmatization is closely associated with labeling victims, where society tends to blame them rather than the perpetrators (Darma et al., 2022). Victim blaming refers to attitudes or practices that hold victims of sexual violence responsible instead of the offenders (Grosser & Tyler, 2022). This issue remains a significant challenge faced by victims and can be profoundly damaging to their emotional and psychological well-being (Putri, 2024). One of the most common arguments involves criticizing victims' clothing, with the assumption that their appearance provokes sexual harassment (Mas'udah, 2022). This creates a misguided perception that victims' clothing is the cause of sexual harassment (Nirmalasari & Sarwono, 2021)

The causes of victim blaming are highly complex, often rooted in myths and stereotypes within society regarding both victims and perpetrators, as well as a lack of understanding of

the psychological and emotional impacts on victims (Murvartian et al., 2023). The absence of witnesses in sexual violence cases further complicates the process of evidence gathering (Mas'udah, 2022). In some instances, proving sexual violence is not only difficult but may also result in further victimization or even punishment of women (Bates et al., 2023). Consequently, women are frequently stigmatized with the notion that the crimes committed against them are ultimately their own fault (Mas'udah, 2022).

Findings from previous studies on victim-blaming of female survivors from a human rights perspective indicate that victims are often expected to manage the physical and psychological consequences of the violence on their own, without adequate support (Mahfud & Rizanizarli, 2021). This situation underscores the urgent need for collective action to ensure that women receive the protections guaranteed to them under Law No. 12 of 2022 on the Crime of Sexual Violence (TKPS). In light of these issues, the present study seeks to examine in greater depth the experiences of communities in the city of Banjarmasin concerning victim-blaming from social and cultural perspectives. Particular attention is given to variations in community attitudes that perpetuate gender inequality, as well as to the ways in which strengthening women's roles may help reduce victim-blaming and foster safer environments for women.

2. Method

This research is qualitative research with a descriptive phenomenological approach that aims to explore in depth the subjective experiences of participants regarding incidents of victim blaming of women who have experienced sexual violence. This research was conducted in Banjarmasin City area from July to September 2025 using purposive sampling techniques on participants who knew about sexual experience with cases of sexual violence and victims of sexual violence. The number of participants in this study was 12 people based on the principle of data saturation. This research has previously obtained ethical approval No. 222/KEPK-SI/VII/2025. The research instrument was the researchers themselves, assisted by interview guidelines, recording equipment, informed consent forms, and field notes (systematic documentation) (Creswell, 2014). The data collection technique used semi-structured interviews with in-depth interview techniques lasting 40-60 minutes per session. The data analysis techniques used was Thematic Analysis (familiarization with the data (understanding the data in depth, initial notes, and conducting member checks of the interview results), generating initial codes (manually assigning codes or keywords)

searching for themes (grouping codes into themes and creating initial thematic maps, conducting peer debriefings), reviewing themes (themes were revised to ensure they were valid, logical, and strong, and triangulation was performed), defining and naming themes (conceptually explaining each theme and its contribution to the research questions/ reflexivity), and writing reports (compiling research results narratives using direct quotation. Thick description).

3. Results and Discussion

This study involved participants from diverse backgrounds, whose demographic characteristics age, gender, educational attainment, occupational roles, and ethnic affiliations are detailed in Table 1. These variables provide contextual insight into the composition of the study sample and inform the interpretation of subsequent findings.

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Participant Characteristics

Characteristics	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Age		
17-25 years	1	8.3
25-35 years	3	25
36-45 years	5	41.7
46-55 years	3	25
Gender		
Male	6	50
Female	6	50
Education		
Bachelor's (S1)	5	41.7
Diploma (D3)	1	8.3
Senior High School	5	41.7
Junior High School	1	8.3
Occupation		
Civil Servant	2	16.7
Private Sector	8	66.6
Entrepreneur	2	16.7
Ethnicity		
Banjar	7	58.3
Javanese	3	25
Minangkabau (Padang)	2	16.7

Based on the research results, five themes were identified in this study. Theme 1 is about Negative Stigma, theme 2 is Coercion, theme 3 is Resolution of Violence, theme 4 is Night Work & Its Risks, and theme 5 is Frustration.

Theme 1 discusses Negative Stigma. Negative stigma in this case refers to negative labeling by a group of people due to difference in perspectives on cases of sexual violence. The following is a quote from a participant:

“...there was a woman, she had tattoo, and she was the one who got blamed.” (P2)

“...she was harassed, and sometimes it is the woman herself who gets blamed, they say it is because she wore sexy clothes...” (P2)

“...if a woman works at night in the nightlife industry, she is always considered not decent.” (P4)

Based on these findings, it is evident that negative stereotypes and harmful portrayals of women persist. Several participants noted that women with tattoos are often labeled as “naughty” or “bad,” while those who wear revealing clothing are viewed as inviting harassment. The study also shows that women who work night shifts in nightlife settings are frequently judged as bad or rebellious. As a result, many participants expressed the belief that women should avoid having tattoos, wearing sexy clothing, or working in the nightlife industry if they do not want to be harassed.

This research aligns with the findings of (Shopiani et al., 2021), who argue that victim blaming serves as a means of justifying injustice by locating fault within the victim often the woman (Nirmalasari & Sarwono, 2021). This dynamic also emerged in the present study, in which participants described how communities and individuals frequently attribute blame to victims (Abdul Hamid, 2021). Women with tattoos, dyed blonde hair, employment in the nightlife industry, or those who wear revealing clothing are often accused of provoking harassment, and consequently, any harassment or violence they experience is framed as their own responsibility. These findings underscore that gender identity plays a significant role in shaping victim-blaming attitudes (Wulandari et al., 2023).

Theme 2 is about coercion. Based on the results of this study, there are actions that force victims of sexual violence to follow what is said by their family or community through threats, pressure, and even intimidation. This is illustrated in the following statement:

“...do not get divorced; otherwise, there will be no husband, and the children will have no father...” (P1)

“...what is the point of reporting it? It will only bring disgrace and shame to the family” (P6)

“...perhaps it was unintentional; it is better to resolve the matter within the family.” (P8)

“...it is better to settle peacefully; dealing with the police is complicated and costly...” (P10).

Based on the above theme regarding coercion against victims, several participants believed that it was best not to take further action or report the incident because it would bring shame and embarrassment to the family. Therefore, the participants considered it unnecessary to report the incident if it could still be resolved amicably or

through reconciliation. In addition, participants said that from the experiences of others they knew, reporting to the police was a long, tiring process that cost a lot of money, so they said that it was not necessary to report to the police because it did not amount to rape. The findings of this study show that participants said that the resolution of sexual violence cases is long, complicated, tiring, and costly, and that if other people find out about the sexual violence, it will tarnish the family's reputation. As a result, many victims of sexual violence are powerless and unsupported by their families, who consider the victims to be overreacting. This, when viewed from the results of the study (Darma et al., 2022), indicates that sexual abuse cases are considered a disgrace. For example, there was a victim who confided in a friend, but instead of receiving support, the victim was blamed with remarks such as, “*You’re being dramatic, why expose your own disgrace?*” The fear of reporting is also shaped by negative social stigma, in which victims are often perceived as the primary cause of the harassment. Moreover, when harassment does not escalate into rape, it is still frequently dismissed as acceptable, merely a joke, or just playful teasing (Kingsberg et al., 2019).

The third theme in this study concerns the resolution of sexual violence cases. The findings reveal that many participants tended to suggest solutions that were detrimental to the victims. These included advising victims to marry the perpetrator, discouraging divorce, forgiving the offender, opting for reconciliation, or urging the victims to be patient. This perspective is reflected in the following statements from participants:

“...just forgive him, no need to get divorced...” (P1)

“...if many people already know, then just marry them off...” (P4)

“...it is better to forgive him, maybe he didn’t mean it...” (P9)

“...it is better to be patient first, don’t rush into making decisions, maybe things could get better” (P11).

Looking at the results of the above study, it is clear that there is a lot of intervention from various parties towards victims of sexual violence, especially the widespread perception that if abuse or violence occurs, it is best to just forgive, and if the parties are not yet married, they should just get married or be told to be patient. This can be seen from the cultural background in this study, as quoted from several participants who are from the Banjar, Javanese, and Padang tribes residing in the city of Banjarmasin in this study, which plays a role in how victims should behave. Culture, especially patriarchy, which is still deeply rooted in Indonesia, will influence a person's perception of a social event or social response related to sexual violence.

In some cultures in this study, sexual violence is still considered a disgrace that must be hidden from the social environment and community.

Based on these findings, it is expected that interventions provided to victims in the future will be more oriented toward the interests and recovery of the victims, rather than solely serving the interests of family or cultural norms (Grosser & Tyler, 2022). Therefore, a more comprehensive approach is needed, targeting the victim's family and close relatives, so that they may serve as constructive sources of support. Such an approach is essential to ensure a better recovery process for victims and to encourage them to report cases of sexual violence (Fazny et al., 2024).

The fourth theme focuses on women's occupations and the risks associated with their work. This study found that women who work at night, particularly in entertainment venues, are often stigmatized as if any harassment they experience is simply a consequence or an occupational risk. In addition, occupations such as domestic workers or babysitters are also considered vulnerable because of their obligation to follow employers' instructions, even under coercive circumstances. Several participants also noted that women in these situations often feel fearful of their employers. The following excerpts illustrate these views:

"... usually those who work at night or in nightlife industry, they already know the risks..." (P4)

"...working as an LC (Ladies Companion) usually means being teased and seduced..." (P6)

"...there are also domestic workers who are forced not to resist because they are afraid of their employers..." (P8)

"...there are also night workers who are lured, so they know the risks of their job and should not complain..." (P12)

The findings of this study indicate that participants perceived women's occupations—particularly those of victims of violence—as influencing decision-making processes related to reporting and seeking help. Participants described night workers as especially vulnerable to sexual violence, noting that such risks are often normalized within society. Within this context, women employed in nightclubs, discos, karaoke venues, or as hostesses are frequently assumed to be fully aware of the occupational hazards they face; consequently, if harassment occurs, they are expected to accept it as part of their job and refrain from disclosing it to family members or others. Sexual violence is viewed as noteworthy only when it involves rape, which is considered a more serious violation.

These perspectives underscore the need for improved public understanding to prevent harmful

misconceptions and highlight the importance of social and familial support for victims support that remains insufficient according to the study's participants.

Therefore, according to (Murvartian et al., 2023), women themselves must have strategies to prevent crime, so women must always be vigilant and prepare for any possibilities that could endanger their safety.

The fifth theme is frustration. In this study, frustration refers to an emotional state observed in victims of violence, where they may become withdrawn, shy, or spend much of their time crying. Some victims display anger by shouting, while others experience rapid mood changes. The following excerpts illustrate these experiences as reported by participants:

"... even to the point of wanting to commit suicide and harm her child" (P1)

"...she became withdrawn after the incident, even refusing to socialize with others..." (P3)

"Some became embarrassed, unwilling to leave the house..." (P7)

"There are also victims who cried constantly, and their emotions could turn to frequent anger." (P10).

Based on the research findings, the impact of sexual violence on some participants was that they realized that hidden sexual violence or the practice of blaming the victim would cause family members or victims of sexual violence to become frustrated and depressed. This was revealed by participants who said that if a family member or friend experienced sexual violence and was blamed, they would withdraw, no longer want to talk, become shy about socializing, and even become someone whose emotions changed quickly from sadness to screaming and even unclear anger. Some even attempted suicide or killed their children. This was because they did not receive support for what they felt as victims of sexual violence. The practice of blaming victims has a very negative impact, as seen in the results of this study, but it is not realized that this impact stems from victim blaming itself. Women become powerless and have low motivation, especially to report their cases, because they face various pressures from their families and society.

This is also in line with the results of research (Li et al., 2023), that most victims of sexual violence experience depression and frustration, which is caused by a lack of support from family or those around them. Victims of sexual violence have coping mechanisms to deal with the trauma they experience. These mechanisms can be adaptive or maladaptive. based on what the participants know and convey, most of the impacts of the lack of social support for victims will lead to maladaptive coping mechanisms where

there is a tendency to engage in self-destructive behavior, such as substance abuse, social isolation, and negative stigma, as mentioned in the previous theme, which also greatly influences the attitudes or behavior of victims, where negative social stigma is one of the biggest obstacles in the recovery of victims of sexual violence (Pina et al., 2021). In addition, cultural background also plays a role in how victims of sexual violence experience and cope with their trauma (Kazmi et al., 2023)

4. Conclusions and Suggestions

Public perceptions of victim blaming in cases of sexual violence against women in this study yielded five themes, namely negative stigma against victims of sexual violence, coercion or interference or intervention by family or others in decision-making that is detrimental to victims, resolution of violence that may also be detrimental to victims, even women's work becoming a factor in blaming victims of violence, and the actual impact known to the public regarding the condition of victims if they are not properly supported or are treated negatively, namely frustration among victims of sexual violence. It is hoped that with the results of this study, the Women's Empowerment Agency, community task forces, and educational institutions will launch public campaigns featuring stories from survivors of sexual violence to eliminate the stigma that a woman's clothing or work makes her someone who deserves to be harassed or provokes sexual violence.

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