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Shame culture and the prevention of sexual harassment in university: A case study in Indonesia

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Abstract

This study aims to explore how the relationship between the culture of shame and the handling of cases of sexual violence in universities in Indonesia. The research location was conducted at three State universities with legal Entities; Universitas Negeri Malang (UM), Universitas Negeri Padang (UNP), and Universitas Sumatera Utara (USU). The data collection procedure was performed through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGD). The results of the study show that the culture of shame in reporting victims is closely related to the course of the handling cases of sexual violence (PKKS) process. Shame due to social and cultural stigma also needs to be considered as a reference in forming policies to prevent and follow up on sexual harassment prevention. This means that apart from the urgency of making regulations or a special team, universities must also be able to provide space, time, and services that can guarantee the safety of victims both physically and psychologically.

Keywords: Islamic perspective, shame culture, sexual harassment, sexual harassment prevention, sexual violence



Public Interest Statement

Sexual violence is a deeply troubling issue affecting communities worldwide, and its impact within university settings is a matter of significant concern. Our research focuses on the complex interplay between the culture of shame and the handling of sexual violence cases in Indonesian universities. Our study, conducted at three Indonesian State universities, delves into the cultural dimensions of shame that often surround victims of sexual violence. We explore how these cultural factors influence the reporting of such cases and the subsequent course of action.

Introduction

Indonesia is known as a cultured and virtuous country (Asfina & Ovilia, 2016). This is coupled with the basis of the Indonesian state, which also shows that Indonesian people adhere to beliefs or divinity (Forshee, 2006). This diversity makes Indonesia rich in culture and variety and a strong ideology. This is reflected in a culture of courtesy, such as ‘loving the young and respecting the old, which has been ingrained since the people were still young. Then, Indonesian society is also known for its sensitivity to individual, family, and religious images, so the culture of shame is often involved as a basis for people’s thoughts and judgments before carrying out a speech act or acting towards something.

Like eastern culture, Indonesia does have a culture of shame that is quite thick, such as being ashamed of being seen as an individual with a negative social background for (Fadhlika & Holish, 2019), being ashamed of not following religious orders (Fadhlika & Holish, 2019; Khodijah, 2008; Sari, 2020), and being ashamed of being seen as impolite when arguing in front of parents (Yunizar, 2019). Shame culture is part of a culture that teaches people to maintain their dignity and self-esteem by avoiding actions that harm or embarrass themselves or others. In a culture of shame, it is considered better to avoid inappropriate or disrespectful situations than to face problems or cause disappointment.

In Islam, the culture of shame is also an essential part of religious teachings. Islam emphasizes the importance of maintaining self-dignity and that of others and avoiding harmful or embarrassing actions. This is noted in several verses of the Qur’an, among others:

“And do not come near to adultery; surely it has been an obscenity and odious as a way” (QS. Al-Isra: 32)

In these verses, it is explained that believers must maintain the dignity of Muslim women and avoid committing adultery because both can harm themselves and others. Thus, the culture of shame is considered a way to protect oneself from actions that are not by religious teachings. In addition, the culture of shame is also a way to maintain self-respect and that of others. In Islam, a person should avoid impolite or inappropriate situations rather than cause trouble or disappointment to oneself or others. This is emphasized in the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad, who said:

“I heard Messenger of Allah say: But between them are certain doubtful things which many people do not recognize. He who guards against doubtful things keeps his religion and his honor blameless, but he who falls into doubtful things falls into what is unlawful.” (Sahih al-Bukhari 1427, 1428)

Thus, the culture of shame is seen as a way to maintain self-dignity and that of others and to avoid action. However, on the one hand, this culture of shame is misused by specific individuals to commit crimes. One of them is arbitrary treatment, such as sexual harassment and violence by more powerful individuals than ordinary groups. It is rarely realized by victims or the general public that a culture of shame instilled from an early age significantly influences cases of sexual violence.

Considering Indonesian society generally adheres to a patriarchal system (Shopiani et al., 2021), women are naturally helpless and weak victims of sexual violence. Moreover, the existence of a culture of shame makes women victims of sexual violence as if they are in a dilemma of shame towards society’s

stigma and a feeling of powerlessness because they do not have the power to fight back. This is an open secret that the Indonesian people are aware of, but many victims prefer to remain silent and ultimately end their lives. Real cases like this have indeed happened several times, such as the late Nova Widayarsi (NW) in December 2021, who chose to end his own life after becoming a victim of sexual violence by a member of the police (Wibowo, 2021). The NW case then became the beginning of the revelation that NW was one of the unfortunate victims of a total of 4,500 complaints of sexual assault cases that year.

The Chairperson of the National Commission on Violence against Women, Andi Yentriyani, stated that cases of sexual violence in Indonesia reached 12,000 reports in 2015-2020 (Adriansyah, 2021). Meanwhile, there were 2,500 incidents of sexual violence in the period January-July 2021. He also said that cases like this often end in dead ends when brought to justice. On the contrary, the perpetrators were not caught in the law and were freed from the accusation of violence. A real example can be observed in the release of the Dean of FISIPOL UNRI from legal bondage after harassing a student majoring in international relations. This is strongly related to the factor of power relations, which ultimately forces and leads the victim to be trapped in the perpetrator's criminal cycle. However, the lack of evidence is a strong reason why the perpetrators are free from the law.

Cases of sexual violence that have occurred among students in Indonesia recently are clear evidence that even educational institutions, which are supposed to be a forum for educating and embracing society, cannot guarantee that women will avoid cases of sexual violence. Although *Permendikbud Ristek* Number 30 of 2021 can be a legal basis for following up on sexual violence in tertiary institutions, cases of sexual violence in tertiary institutions still occur frequently. This sad fact is also a sign that handling cases of sexual violence in Indonesian tertiary institutions are a crucial matter that naturally becomes one of the main aspects that higher education institutions need to pay attention to. Therefore, this research was conducted to investigate the relationship between the culture of social shame and the handling of cases of sexual violence in universities in Indonesia. The results of this research are expected to be a reference in strengthening and supporting institutions in efforts to prevent and handle sexual violence in tertiary institutions. In addition, this research will likely trigger the community to have the courage to speak out, fight against, and report all acts of sexual violence.

Based on the above background, the issues raised in this study are to explore how the relationship between the culture of shame and the handling of cases of sexual violence in universities in Indonesia. This research limits the scope of the study, namely only focusing on three campuses in Indonesia, namely the University of North Sumatra, Padang State University, and Malang State University. Researchers chose these three campuses because they have the status of a Legal Entity State University (PTN BH), which has full autonomy both academically and non-academically to manage the college itself. Autonomously, these universities should be able to move more quickly and effectively in preventing and handling cases of sexual violence in the university environment. Thus, this research is suitable for applying to the three universities. Since childhood, a person is taught to have a sense of shame, such as being ashamed of doing something terrible, impolite, or contrary to the norms of their environment. The definition of shame indicates that it is closely related to ethics and morality. The word shame culture consists of two words: culture and shame. According to the Big Indonesian Dictionary ("Departemen Pendidikan Nasional," 2008) culture is defined as (1) thoughts; fairness; results, (2) customs, (3) something related to a developed culture (civilized, advanced), and (4) something that has become a culture and is difficult to change. Whereas shame is defined as: (1) feeling very bad (despicable, low, etc.) for doing something wrong (not quite right, different from usual, has flaws or deficiencies, etc.), and (3) being unhappy (low, despicable, etc.).

According to Sostrodihardjo (1998), shame culture is a traditional value developed by society to regulate interactions between family members and society as a whole. As stated previously, the culture of

shame is a traditional value developed by society to regulate interaction relations between family members and society as a whole, where norms are then compiled that determine what is considered good and what is considered bad.

One of the most important aspects of legal culture is “shame culture,” which is the most important part of Indonesian society’s eastern customs (Negara, 2018). Shame Culture is a culture that reflects that a person has no shame when committing an offence, except when the offence is known to the public. People who practice a shame culture are usually not afraid to commit violations because they believe that as long as the violation is unknown to others, it is still within safe limits. In Indonesia, where people still have a low level of awareness of the law, small things like running red lights, falsifying administrative papers, and so on are evidence that this culture of shame is still strong.

The culture of shame ingrained in society has become a social institution. In a culture of shame, a form of social institution is a feeling of loss of public trust, which is seen as a form of punishment that makes a person try to take stronger self-control actions that violate laws and other social norms (Negara, 2018). Reflecting on the culture of shame in contemporary Indonesia, reality reveals that this nation steeped in eastern values appears to have suffered degradation in upholding its culture of shame. Shame has recently undergone a remarkable ethical renewal; shame is no longer a feeling that must be implemented in the context of social life. Shame is no longer an ethic or feeling, so the finer one’s feelings should be, the more ‘shame’ will be able to form one’s soul awareness of oneself and society, but what happens is the opposite, the soul’s awareness fades away as the shame disappears (Negara, 2018).

Shame triggers a person to modify his behavior to adapt to the environment easily. Shame is one of the determinants of social behavior (Negara, 2018). If we look at today’s life, where the culture of shame is starting to disappear in people’s lives, things that were previously very taboo and embarrassing have become very common or common things; adultery occurs everywhere and is even legalized in society. as a livelihood, there are many cases of rape committed by fathers to their biological children, husbands or wives who have an affair and other things that used to be taboo or embarrassing are starting to become commonplace (Pratama, 2017).

The shame culture appears to be the people’s self-identity in Indonesia. Unfortunately, this condition is not directly proportional to how people respond to problems encountered because shame can sometimes act as a boomerang for individuals. As a result of this shame culture, individuals are vulnerable to arbitrary treatment by others who are more dominant or have power relations. The emergence of cases of sexual violence in Indonesia is one of the negative consequences of this culture of shame.

Sexual violence or sexual abuse can happen to anyone (Anggraini et al., 2020). It is consistent with the impact of sexual violence, according to Finkelhor and Browne (Tower, 2002), regarding stigmatization; namely, sexual violence can make victims feel guilty and ashamed, have a bad self-image and feel that they are different from other people. Sexual violence is a type of crime that targets a person’s genital organs and can cause severe physical and psychological trauma to the victim. (Salamah et al., 2021). Victims of sexual violence may experience negative emotions such as shame, hatred, anger, offense, trauma, and so on (Salamah et al., 2021). Sexual violence can take many forms, from verbal abuse like catcalling or jokes with a sexual undertone to touching or rape (Mardina, 2019).

(Purwanti & Hardiyanti, 2018) define sexual violence as someone who commits verbal and physical acts without the victim’s consent and causes various losses. These losses can be both material and immaterial. According to (Waruwu, 2017), material losses are real, visible, and quantifiable losses, such as money, property, etc. In contrast, immaterial losses are losses experienced by someone whose nominal value cannot be calculated and tends to things that are not visible, such as disappointment, shame, trauma, anxiety, and pain. Sexual violence is an intentional act committed under certain conditions that include elements of

discrimination (Fitri et al., 2022).

Sexual violence is defined by the World Report on Violence and Health (Dartnall et al., 2013) as any sexual act, attempt to obtain sexual activity, or act of associating for sexual purposes aimed at someone using coercion, harassment, or more than that which is done by anyone regardless of the victim's relationship, including but not limited to home and work. The WHO then reiterated that sexual violence is inextricably linked to coercion and that coercion can take many forms. It can include psychological intimidation, blackmail or threats of injury, dismissal or refusal to accept work, and physical coercion. According to (Armstrong et al., 2018, sexual violence is a form of dominance over various dimensions of inequality, such as gender, class, race, and others.

According to (*Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, Dan Teknologi Republik Indonesia Nomor 30 Tahun 2021 Tentang Pencegahan Dan Penanganan Kekerasan Seksual Di Perguruan Tinggi*, 2021), article 5 of the Minister of Education and Culture Law, Number 30 of 2021, concerning the Prevention and Handling of Sexual Violence in Higher Education Environments, the types of sexual violence that can occur on campus include actions carried out verbally or verbally, non-physically, physically, and sexual violence committed through technology. This Permendikbud is regarded as a transformation and a more advanced movement in dealing with cases of sexual violence in tertiary institutions. According to the PPKS Supporting Academic Paper, cases of sexual violence in Indonesian tertiary institutions continue to emerge (Fitri et al., 2022).

The rise of sexual violence in various tertiary institutions recently illustrates that even educated people can lose their minds and commit acts of harassment against others (Simanjuntak & Isbah, 2022). In cases in tertiary institutions, not all victims have the power to muster up the will to report to friends, the campus, the police, Komnas Perempuan's partner institutions, or institutions for victims of sexual violence in Indonesia.

Since 2019, there have been numerous cases of sexual violence revealed to the public, and one could even call it a pandemic of sexual violence (*'Pandemi Kekerasan Seksual' Di Kampus Dan Permendikbud 30: Mengapa 'Tanpa Persetujuan Korban' Dimaknai 'Pelegalan Kebebasan Seks?', 2021*). Sexual violence in tertiary institutions has mostly been reported in major cities such as Yogyakarta, Bandung, Riau, and Jakarta.

According to (Noviana, 2015), perpetrators of sexual violence are typically people from the victim's environment. It can be done by college friends and all actors on campus, including lecturers, in the case of universities. Students are not receiving the service they are entitled to. The dominance of power on campus from various parties often makes students feel weak and powerless to report acts of sexual violence. (Jewkes & Morrell, 2012) say that acquiescence to gender norms comes from social and cultural patterns in which girls are seen as helping to keep men in power and where resistance to this would call into question the basis of normative understandings of how men and women relate to each other. Such notions of gender and sexuality are woven into the campus space, where girls may accommodate such norms in their experiences of violence, limiting their ability to resist. However, submitting to male domination is not a complete description of the life of girls on campus. (Janak et al., 2022)

There may still be many cases of sexual violence that are not "seen" and are not reported due to various factors. A study conducted by the National College of Women's Sexual Victimization in the United States explains that there are various reasons why victims of sexual violence do not report their cases to the authorities, namely victims do not have sufficient evidence to report, fear that the perpetrator is preparing retaliation, fear of hostility from the authorities, there is uncertainty whether the report will be taken seriously and carried out by the authorities, there is ignorance of how to report to the authorities, and there is a desire that family and friends do not know (Krebs et al., 2007).

Methods

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach with a case study methodology. According to (Creswell, 2012), case studies are part of a research strategy in which researchers carefully investigate a program, event, activity, process, or group of individuals. According to (Sugiyono, 2015), qualitative research considers objects dynamic, resulting from thought construction and interpretation of observed symptoms. It is complete because every aspect of the object has a unity that cannot be separated. The study was carried out at the State University of Malang (UM), the Padang State University (UNP), and the University of North Sumatra (USU). Surveys, in-depth interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGD), secondary data, and observation were used to collect data. The survey was conducted on student communities, lecturers and education staff at each campus. In-depth interviews were conducted with university leaders, the Code of Ethics Institute, the Center for Gender Studies (PSG), Student Affairs Organizations, and related institutions. The FGD presented respondents from students, lecturers and students. Secondary data include internal college rules/policies, university profiles, and other related data, for example, from journals, newspapers, the internet, and others. While field observations were carried out in 3 universities: UM, UNP, and USU.

Results and Discussion

Shame Culture and Prevention of Sexual Violence in Higher Education

Based on the results of the FGD and questionnaires, the researcher found several relevant findings to answer the research questions. At the FGD stage, the researcher first socialized the respondents about what constituted acts of sexual harassment and violence. Then, respondents were directed to fill out an online questionnaire on the Prevention and Handling of Sexual Violence (PPKS). Sexual violence itself can occur in various forms, such as sexual harassment, rape, trafficking in persons, and so on. Sexual violence can happen to anyone, both men and women, and can occur at any age. Sexual violence can cause various negative impacts on victims, such as trauma, depression, psychiatric disorders, etc.

The attitude of shame in reporting sexual violence is often influenced by the culture of shame that exists in society. Shame culture is the attitude shown by someone when they feel uncomfortable or embarrassed about their actions or actions that are not by the norms that apply in society. This culture of shame can strengthen the existing stigma against sexual violence so that many victims do not want to disclose what happened because they are afraid of being seen as someone who is impolite or inappropriate.

The culture of shame and sexual violence are critical issues in today's society. Shame culture is an attitude shown by someone when they feel uncomfortable or embarrassed about their actions or actions that are not in accordance with the norms that apply in society. On the other hand, sexual violence is an act committed by someone to gain a sexual advantage by forcing or deceiving others. Shame culture is often seen as unfavorable because it can cause a person to become introverted and not want to share their problems. This can be especially problematic when someone is sexually assaulted, as they may not be willing or able to seek help or report the incident to others.

Embarrassment to report sexual violence is a severe problem in today's society. Many victims of sexual assault are unwilling or unable to report the incident because they feel ashamed or uncomfortable with the situation. This can worsen the situation for victims, as they do not get the necessary help and support to recover from the incident. Based on an interview with one of the victims, he said, "I was embarrassed to report the incident; I was afraid of my grades because you were my mentor. Then I was also afraid of being slandered by him. I am also afraid of being ostracized by my friends" (AF, 22 years).

A culture of shame can also strengthen the existing stigma against sexual violence so that many victims do not want to disclose what happened because they are afraid of being seen as someone who is impolite or inappropriate. This can complicate the recovery process for victims of sexual violence, as they

do not receive the support and assistance they need. Another interviewed victim also said, "I was grabbed from my hands to my breasts. I'm ashamed to say it. Besides, I was afraid to take pictures or record them. Then I also want to report being confused for fear of being asked for evidence".

Shame in an Islamic Perspective and Its Impact on the Prevention of Sexual Violence

In Islam, shyness is one of the most critical attitudes. The argument can be found in various verses of the Qur'an and the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad. One of the verses of the Al-Qur'an that explains the attitude of shame is the letter Al-Hasyr verse 19, which reads: "And be ye not like Those who forgot God; And He made them forget Their own souls! Such Are the rebellious transgressors!". This verse emphasizes the importance of not doing things that can make us forget Allah and the hereafter. In addition, in the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad, it is said that shyness is part of faith. In Riyad as-Salihin 125, Rasulullah SAW said: "Iman has over seventy branches - or over sixty branches - the uppermost of which is the declaration: 'None has the right to be worshipped but Allah'; and the least of which is the removal of harmful object from the road, and modesty is a branch of Iman" (Al-Bukhari and Muslim). Thus, shame is one of the main components of a Muslim's faith.

Shyness is also a way to maintain self-respect and that of others. As it is said in the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, "Shame protects honor." By having an attitude of shame, we will not do things that can damage our honor or that of others. In this study, Muslim informants were interviewed about why they were ashamed and tended to keep the sexual violence they experienced on campus tight. "I'm ashamed, bro, because I've been tainted, mas. That's an order that God has forbidden, sir. But I can't avoid it because I'm in a pinch. If I don't comply, my grades won't come out" (SAN, 20 years).

Shame can also be an indicator of one's kindness and truth. In the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, it is said that "A person who does not have an attitude of shame will not get better." Thus, shyness can signify that a person has goodness in him. Another informant, NAP (21 years), said, "let me keep this secret, sir; I did not expect that you were such an asshole. I want to be a good person, sir. If I report, I can be branded as seeking sensation or destroying other people's relationships. I am a victim".

From an Islamic perspective, shame is also a way to protect oneself from evil deeds. As it is said in the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, "Shame is part of faith. When one part of faith is lost, then everything will be lost". Thus, shame can be a way to keep our faith intact. Shame in Islam can also help a person avoid behavior inconsistent with societal norms. Shame will make a person feel bad if he commits an act, not by society's standards, so he will try to avoid it. Thus, shame can be a driving force for someone to prevent behavior that is not following societal norms. Shame in Islam can also help a person strengthen social relations with others. Shame will make a person feel bad if he commits an act that is not under the norms of society, so he will try to avoid it.

Conclusion

The conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that the culture of shame in reporting victims is closely related to the course of the PKKS handling process. Shame due to social and cultural stigma also needs to be considered as a reference in forming policies to prevent and follow up on PKKS. This means that apart from the urgency of making regulations or a special team, campuses must also be able to provide space, time, and services that can guarantee the safety of victims both physically and psychologically. Socialization about having the courage to speak and having the courage to consult about PKKS is not taboo or embarrassing. It needs to be instilled early on and campaigned on campuses throughout Indonesia. This not only helps the campus to create a clean and safe educational environment for PKKS but also has an excellent opportunity to save victims who may have been traumatized and dare not speak up until now.

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