

Exploration of gender sensitivity competence of guidance and counseling teachers in handling victims of sexual harassment in schools

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Abstract: *This study aims to explore the gender sensitivity competence of Guidance and Counseling (BK) teachers in handling cases of sexual harassment in schools in Lampung. The research employed a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with five BK teachers who had experience in handling sexual harassment cases. The findings revealed that participants' understanding of gender issues and sexual harassment was still limited. Participants tended to view sexual harassment as a problem that occurs more frequently among female students, often overlooking the fact that male students are also vulnerable to becoming victims. This reflects a limited understanding of sexual harassment and gender issues. In terms of skills, the study found that participants had not fully mastered gender-sensitive counseling skills. For instance, some participants tended to blame the victim based on appearance or behavior, indicating a lack of ability to provide empathetic and unbiased support. Furthermore, the attitudes of BK teachers toward sexual harassment cases were still influenced by gender stereotypes. This study highlights the importance of ongoing training to enhance the gender sensitivity competence of BK teachers, enabling them to offer more empathetic and inclusive support to all victims of sexual harassment in the school environment.*

Keywords: *Gender Sensitivity; Guidance and Counseling; Sexual Harassment; Teacher Competence*

Introduction

Sexual harassment is a critical global problem with far-reaching physical, emotional, and psychological impacts on victims, especially in educational settings (Krahé, 2020). Schools, which are supposed to be safe spaces for growth and learning, often fall short of this expectation, with many cases of sexual harassment going unaddressed or poorly managed (Vanner, 2017). This reality shows that educational settings still have many weaknesses in protecting students from sexual harassment.

Lampung Province is also not free from the problem of sexual harassment in educational settings. Cases of sexual harassment in schools and colleges in Lampung have emerged in recent years, showing that this problem is not only national in nature, but also very relevant locally. Data from the PPA Symphony shows that victims of sexual violence in Lampung are dominated by elementary and junior high school students (Napitupulu, 2023). Several cases include sexual harassment by teachers or principals against students, such as the case of a principal in Lampung who harassed two female students under the guise of providing counseling on sexual harassment (Mohay, 2023). Law enforcement against perpetrators often encounters obstacles, such as cases where child sexual abuse cases in Lampung ended peacefully and the perpetrators fled (Zai, 2023). This condition reflects weaknesses in the child protection system and law enforcement in Lampung, which causes perpetrators of sexual violence against children to often escape punishment. The absence of firm action and resolution of cases through peaceful means will only worsen the situation, increase the risk of similar cases recurring, and send the wrong message about tolerance for sexual violence.

Despite the seriousness of the problem, there are still gaps in addressing the competencies needed for effective intervention, especially the role of Guidance and Counseling (BK) teachers in schools. As important figures in handling student welfare, BK teachers must

be equipped with gender sensitivity skills to provide effective support to victims of sexual harassment (Meyer, 2015). The lack of appropriate response and handling of these cases reflects the lack of awareness and responsibility of educational institutions in maintaining the safety and welfare of students. This not only creates trauma for victims, but also has the potential to disrupt the overall teaching and learning process, as well as strengthen a culture of silence and impunity for perpetrators (Flecha, 2021). The increasing prevalence of such cases in Lampung highlights the urgency of mapping and improving the competence of BK teachers in gender sensitivity (Tresky, 2010).

Gender sensitivity is an important aspect in guidance and counseling (Irawan et al., 2024; Joshi, 2015), especially in handling cases of sexual harassment. Sexual violence has an impact on the mental health of victims, which requires an empathetic and gender-sensitive approach in providing support (Anderson & Claes, 2022; de Vogel & Nicholls, 2016). Schools are expected to be a safe environment for students, where guidance and counseling (BK) teachers have an important role in handling cases of sexual harassment and providing support to victims. However, recent studies have shown that many BK teachers do not yet have adequate sensitivity and understanding of gender issues, which are very important in handling cases of sexual harassment effectively (Nuraini, 2022; Priyatna et al., 2023). Although the number of cases of sexual harassment in Lampung continues to increase, the competence of BK teachers in handling victims with gender sensitivity is still questionable. This inability can lead to ineffective handling of cases of sexual harassment, potentially worsening the trauma and psychological impact on victims.

To address this issue, it is important to know the gender sensitivity competency of guidance and counseling teachers. Such assessment will help identify specific areas that need improvement, ensuring that guidance and counseling teachers can provide empathetic and appropriate support to victims of sexual harassment. This study aims to bridge this gap by conducting a qualitative study to explore the gender sensitivity competency of guidance and counseling teachers in Lampung, providing insight into their current capabilities and identifying areas that need improvement.

The existing literature shows a significant gap in the competence of guidance and counseling teachers in handling sexual harassment cases with gender sensitivity. While studies by Umami (2022) and Madrid et al. (2020) emphasize the importance of gender sensitivity in counseling, research that specifically focuses on guidance and counseling teachers in Lampung is still lacking. In addition, although many studies have explored the general competence of guidance and counseling teachers, for example professional competence (Nurrahmi, 2015) pedagogical competence (Wardhani et al., 2019) and supervisor competence (Wutsqo et al., 2021), only a few have specifically assessed their gender sensitivity competence in handling sexual harassment cases. Previous studies have emphasized the importance of gender sensitivity training for educators, especially BK teachers (Krišová et al., 2020; Lumadi & Shongwe, 2010; Niones-Bojos, 2022; Yuden et al., 2020). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to conduct an exploration to map the gender sensitivity competencies of BK teachers in dealing with victims of sexual harassment in schools in Lampung.

Research Methods:

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design to explore and understand the gender sensitivity competency of BK teachers in handling sexual harassment cases in schools. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the experiences, understanding, attitudes, and skills of BK teachers in dealing with sexual harassment issues in the school environment (Padilla-Díaz, 2015).

The subjects of the study consisted of BK teachers who had experience handling sexual harassment cases in schools. The sample was selected by purposive sampling with the criteria; (1) experience handling sexual harassment cases, (2) variation in school background, and (3) variation in age and work experience. A total of 5 BK teachers from various high schools in the research area will be involved as participants, covering public and private schools, to obtain a variety of perspectives and experiences. The names of the participants are disguised as a code of ethics for the study. The following are the demographics of the participants:

Table 1 Demographics of Participants

No	Initial	Gender	Age	School Satatus
1	YN	Female	35	Private
2	AN	Male	26	State
3	A	Female	27	State
4	YS	Male	31	Private
5	WL	Female	30	State

The data collection method focused on in this study was semi-structured interviews (Blandford, 2013). The data collection method in this study mainly focused on the use of semi-structured interviews to explore the understanding, attitudes, and gender sensitivity skills of Guidance and Counseling (BK) teachers in handling cases of sexual harassment in schools. Each interview is estimated to last for 60-90 minutes.

The interview questions will cover topics such as the BK teachers' understanding of the concept of gender sensitivity, how they handle sexual harassment cases with a gender-sensitive approach, and their attitudes in implementing gender sensitivity principles. These questions are designed to guide participants in sharing their experiences and views.

The data in this study were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) based on the approach developed by Eatough & Smith (2017). IPA was chosen because this method allows researchers to understand the experiences of the subjects in depth, especially how BK teachers interpret and interpret gender sensitivity competencies in handling sexual harassment cases.

Discussion and Result

Teachers' Understanding of Gender Issues and Sexual Harassment

This study found that Guidance and Counseling (BK) teachers generally have the view that sexual harassment is more often experienced by women, and this understanding tends to ignore the possibility that sexual harassment can also occur to male students. The Interpretative

Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach revealed that many BK teachers assume that women are the only potential victims of sexual harassment in the school environment. Most BK teachers in this study stated that sexual harassment usually occurs to female students, and they focus more on providing attention and support to female students when handling harassment cases. YN stated:

“Usually, sexual harassment is more common in girls. I rarely hear cases involving boys, so I focus more on female students.”

This statement reflects the belief that sexual harassment is a problem that is typical of women and rarely occurs in boys. As a result of this view, many BK teachers do not pay attention to or even ignore signs of harassment experienced by male students.

Research by Bondestam & Lundqvist (2020) highlights that narrow perceptions about gender and sexual harassment can hinder educators from providing appropriate support to all victims. When school counselors focus only on cases involving female students, they may fail to provide the necessary protection and intervention for male victims, leaving them vulnerable to the long-term negative impacts of harassment.

Research also shows that gender stereotypes still have a strong influence on BK teachers' perceptions and responses to cases of sexual harassment. These stereotypes often direct teachers' attention to focus more on cases involving girls, while paying less attention or underestimating cases involving boys (Geddes et al., 2013; Rahimi & Liston, 2011). A said:

"I feel that girls are more vulnerable to sexual harassment, so I am always more vigilant about them."

This statement shows that gender stereotypes can affect teachers' level of sensitivity and awareness of cases of sexual harassment. Attitudes like this reflect that gender stereotypes are still an obstacle in developing balanced and fair gender sensitivity competencies. By considering girls as a more vulnerable group, teachers tend to ignore or be less responsive to cases involving boys, even though both require equally serious attention and handling.

The tendency to view sexual harassment as a problem that primarily affects girls not only ignores the experiences of male victims but can also lead to inequities in the handling of cases. This leads to the possibility of underreporting or insufficient reporting of cases of sexual harassment experienced by boys, because victims feel that their problems are less prioritized or considered insignificant. This finding is in line with research conducted by Clancy et al. (2020), which states that gender stereotypes can prevent educators from providing equitable attention and support to all victims of sexual harassment.

Understanding how gender issues and social norms influence student behavior and how this can impact the occurrence of sexual harassment is one of the findings in Mayer's research (2009). Meyer highlights that the role of teachers is crucial in recognizing, preventing, and addressing sexual harassment behavior in the school environment. To carry out this role, teachers must first understand how gender stereotypes and traditional roles can contribute to bullying and sexual harassment. By increasing this understanding, teachers can be more responsive and proactive in creating a safe and inclusive environment for all students.

Burn (2019) added that sexual harassment is not only limited to physical acts but also includes other forms such as comments, gestures, and actions based on gender, gender expression, or sexual orientation. With a narrow understanding, non-physical forms of harassment such as verbal harassment, catcalling, or spreading sexual rumors may be ignored, even though they still have a negative impact on the victim.

Furthermore, Burn (2019) said that a narrow understanding of sexual harassment can cause society, including in schools, to ignore or underestimate the psychological impact of sexual harassment, so that victims do not get the support they need. Therefore, it is important for teachers to have a comprehensive understanding of the various forms of sexual harassment in order to be more effective in preventing and handling these situations in the school environment.

Teacher Skills in Handling Sexual Harassment Cases

The findings of this study indicate that the counseling skills of Guidance and Counseling (BK) teachers in handling sexual harassment cases are still inadequate, especially in terms of gender sensitivity. Data analysis revealed that participants tend to have a view that blames the victim, especially based on aspects such as how to dress, use of make-up, or the victim's physical appearance. One example that reflects a victim-blaming attitude is a statement from AN who said:

"Sometimes I feel that harassment can happen because of the way students dress too revealingly. If they had dressed more modestly, maybe it wouldn't have happened."

This statement shows that participants still have a view that blames the victim based on how they dress, without understanding that sexual harassment is entirely the perpetrator's wrong action, and not the victim's fault. This attitude shows a lack of understanding of the concept of gender sensitivity and reflects stereotypes that hinder participants' ability to provide appropriate and non-prejudiced support to victims.

In addition, some participants also expressed views that blamed victims based on aspects of physical appearance, such as the use of make-up or beauty. For example, YS commented:

"Maybe if they didn't wear make-up or weren't so eye-catching, they wouldn't be the target of harassment."

This statement indicates that participants still have biases against victims and tend to blame their physical appearance as the trigger for harassment. This shows that gender-sensitive counseling skills have not been fully mastered, and can actually have a negative impact on victims who should be receiving support.

Blaming the victim is very contrary to the principles of gender-sensitive counseling (Enns, 2000), where the BK teacher should be able to provide support without prejudice and help victims understand that harassment is not their fault. Research by Bondestam & Lundqvist

(2020) also emphasizes that blaming the victim is a form of lack of gender sensitivity and can result in victims feeling blamed, ashamed, or reluctant to report their cases.

Research conducted by Kågesten et al., (2016) shows that there is a view that female students who are potentially sexually harassed must maintain their own attitudes and behaviors to avoid sexual harassment. In their study, Kågesten et al., (2016) found that participants suggested that the way to prevent harassment was to be more "disciplined" with themselves, such as not being too close to boys, not talking to them at night, or avoiding wearing clothes that were considered to trigger sexual desire. These statements indicate that participants tend to see themselves as the party who must be responsible for avoiding harassment, rather than realizing that the act of harassment is entirely the fault of the perpetrator. This view places the burden on victims to avoid situations that can trigger harassment, as if they are to blame for the behavior of others (Weingarten, 2016).

This reinforces a culture of victim blaming, where women feel that they do not have the power to oppose harassment or report perpetrators because they are worried about the negative image or views of their surroundings (Easteal et al., 2015). This situation shows a misconception about sexual harassment in society, where the responsibility is entirely in the hands of the victim. This attitude causes many victims to not have the knowledge or courage to face or report the harassment they experience, which ultimately reinforces the cycle of harassment and makes it difficult to prevent and address this problem (Taylor, 2020).

A study conducted by Felix & McMahon (2006) found that the lack of training and education related to gender sensitivity contributes to the attitude of victim blaming that is still widely found among teachers. They are often unaware that their actions can reinforce the negative stigma against victims of harassment, thus hindering the process of recovery and seeking justice. This study emphasizes the importance of training programs for teachers, especially in equipping them with gender-sensitive counseling skills and a deeper understanding of the dynamics of sexual harassment.

Teachers' Attitudes towards Gender Sensitivity and Sexual Harassment Issues

The results also showed that participants' perceptions of what constitutes sexual harassment varied greatly, and this affected how they handled these cases. Some participants only understood sexual harassment as physical acts, such as unwanted touching or physical force. WL commented:

"For me, sexual harassment is when there is unwanted physical contact. If there is no touching, I am not sure if it can be called harassment."

This view shows a limited understanding of sexual harassment and can hinder participants in recognizing and addressing other forms of harassment. As a result, students who experience verbal, non-verbal, or digital harassment may not get the support they need because their cases are not taken seriously.

On the other hand, there were participants who had a broader understanding of sexual harassment. They recognized that harassment can occur in various forms, including verbal, non-verbal, and digital. A stated:

“Sexual harassment is not just about physical contact. Actions such as inappropriate comments, annoying stares, or harassing digital messages can also be very detrimental to students.”

This statement confirms that sexual harassment is not only limited to physical acts, but also includes various other forms that can have a negative impact on students. Actions such as inappropriate comments, annoying stares, or harassing digital messages are also forms of sexual harassment that can be very detrimental to victims. This shows that harassment can occur verbally, non-verbally, or through digital technology, and its effects can be just as damaging as physical harassment.

Research conducted by Smith (2022) supports the findings of this study. In her study, she found that although there were some teachers who showed awareness of the issue of sexual harassment, many still had apathetic or permissive attitudes, especially towards non-physical harassment such as verbal or digital harassment. This permissive attitude leads to a lack of intervention and support for victims, especially because cases that do not involve physical contact are often considered less serious. This study recommends the need for comprehensive training for teachers to improve their understanding of the various forms of sexual harassment, so that they can provide more appropriate and supportive responses to victims.

Smith's recommendation was also emphasized by Lee (2021) who examined the impact of gender sensitivity training on teachers' ability to handle cases of sexual harassment. The results of the study showed that teachers who had received gender sensitivity training tended to have a more proactive and responsive attitude in dealing with cases of sexual harassment. This training helped teachers recognize various forms of harassment, including non-physical ones, such as verbal comments or digital harassment. In addition, trained teachers showed greater empathy towards victims, which is very important in providing appropriate support and helping victims feel heard and understood. This study emphasizes the importance of ongoing training for teachers to ensure they can provide appropriate interventions and not blame victims in cases of sexual harassment.

Research conducted by Martin (2023) highlights the importance of understanding and dealing with verbal and digital sexual harassment in schools. They found that many teachers still show attitudes that ignore or underestimate these forms of harassment, often considering them as students' behavior that is not serious or common. However, this study also found that teachers who had received training on sexual harassment were better able to recognize various forms of harassment, including those that occur online. Trained teachers showed a more proactive attitude in providing support to victims and in creating a supportive environment. This suggests that raising awareness of non-physical forms of harassment is an important part of teacher training.

Nguyen (2020) highlighted the role of teacher empathy in supporting victims of sexual harassment. This study showed that teachers with high levels of empathy were better able to provide effective emotional and practical support to victims, helping them feel supported and understood. In contrast, teachers who lack empathy tend to ignore or downplay victims' experiences, which can exacerbate the trauma experienced by students. The results of this study confirm that empathy is a key element in dealing with cases of sexual harassment in schools

and suggest that empathy training should be part of teacher professional development programs, so that they are better able to support

Conclusion

The conclusion of this study shows that the competence of guidance and counseling teachers in handling sexual harassment in schools still needs to be improved, especially in terms of gender sensitivity. Although guidance and counseling teachers are recognized as having an important role in providing support to victims, based on the confessions of the participants, they have limited understanding and even blame the victims for the harassment that occurs, especially if the harassment does not involve physical contact. This reflects the lack of gender-sensitive skills and attitudes in handling cases of sexual harassment.

This study also confirms that gender stereotypes still greatly influence the way guidance and counseling teachers respond to cases of sexual harassment, where they focus more on giving attention to female victims and tend to ignore male victims. The attitude of blaming the victim and the narrow view of sexual harassment indicate that there are still many obstacles in the development of gender-sensitive competence among guidance and counseling teachers. This situation not only hinders the recovery process for victims but also reinforces the culture of sexual harassment in schools.

Therefore, this study recommends the need for ongoing and comprehensive training for guidance and counseling teachers in understanding various forms of sexual harassment and developing gender-sensitive counseling skills. With proper training, it is hoped that guidance and counseling teachers can provide more empathetic and responsive support, as well as create a safer and more inclusive school environment for all students, regardless of gender.

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