

DETERMINANT FACTORS OF ADOLESCENTS' KNOWLEDGE ABOUT SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

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Received: 18 July 2025

Revised: 31 July 2025

Accepted: 30 September 2025

Available Online: 30 November 2025

KEYWORDS

Adolescents

Early Age

Knowledge

Sexual Harassment

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The phenomenon of sexual harassment is increasing and has become a serious issue in Indonesia. In daily life, many people experience this form of violence without being able to do much to avoid it and are forced to let it happen. Sexual harassment also frequently occurs in schools and on university campuses. Although students' knowledge about sexual harassment is relatively good, it still needs to be improved. The majority of respondents have experienced at least one form of sexual harassment, including unwanted sexual attention and gender-based violence, committed by both known and unknown individuals. This study aims to explore adolescents' knowledge of sexual harassment within educational settings. The variables explored and analyzed in this study include socio-demographic factors such as gender and age; knowledge of sexual harassment, measured using the Sexual Harassment Definition Questionnaire; experiences of sexual harassment, assessed using the Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (SEQ); and attitudes toward gender roles, measured using the Sexual Harassment Attitude Scale. Univariate, bivariate, and multivariate analyses were conducted to provide descriptive insights into the distribution of the variables examined. Most respondents had good knowledge of sexual harassment in educational environments, were under 19 years old, female, lived with their parents, and had never received information about sexual harassment within educational settings. The most dominant variable associated with knowledge of sexual harassment was age, with an OR of 2.575 (95% CI OR: 1.875–3.536), indicating that adolescents over the age of 19 were 2.575 times more likely to have lower levels of knowledge compared to those under 19 years old. When violence frequently occurs in an environment and is often witnessed, it gradually becomes normalized. Therefore, support from various stakeholders is needed to enhance adolescents' knowledge of sexual harassment in educational settings, beginning as early as possible.

INTRODUCTION

Incidents of sexual harassment in Indonesia's education sector continue to increase. Research findings show that 94% of adolescents need consultation regarding sex and reproductive health, face limitations in accessing appropriate sources of information, and tend to seek information on their own (1). Reports of sexual harassment exposure among international university students show prevalence rates ranging from 3% to 93%, while exposure to sexual discrimination has been reported among 19% to 92% of respondents. Additionally,

22% of female students have experienced dating violence, and nearly 20% have experienced attempted or completed sexual harassment since entering university. Certain groups are at higher risk of experiencing sexual harassment due to pre-existing marginalisation, including lesbian and bisexual women, students with functional disabilities, students classified as non-white based on race, and those with a prior history of sexual harassment(2,3). Sexual harassment can be experienced by anyone, at any age, and can occur in schools, communities, or public spaces. It is a form of behaviour directed toward sexual matters, carried out unilaterally, and unwanted by the individual targeted. Such violence can occur anywhere and triggers adverse reactions from victims, such as shame, anger, hatred, offence, and other emotional responses(4). Sexual harassment can be categorised into visual violence (such as leering, threatening stares toward the victim, and sexual gestures), verbal violence (such as whistling, gossip, sexual jokes, and threatening statements), and physical violence (such as touching, pinching, slapping, intentionally bumping into someone, groping, and unwanted physical closeness) (4).

Examples of seemingly unintentional sexual harassment that often occur in schools or on university campuses include a teacher or lecturer sitting next to a female or male student and unintentionally touching or holding inappropriate parts of their body, or using language referring to inappropriate body parts under the pretext of making a joke in class. Even if unintentional, actions such as inappropriate touching or sexually suggestive comments should be framed as sexual harassment or unwanted sexual attention, rather than being dismissed as accidental or humorous (6). Both short-term and long-term effects can arise from physical and psychological sexual harassment experienced by students and staff, and more than half of the students and lecturers who experience sexual harassment choose to hide the incident (2). Incidents of sexual harassment in higher education range from 11 to 73 percent among heterosexual women and from 3 to 26 percent among heterosexual men, with the highest rates occurring among female students at lower levels of education and in cases of online sexual harassment (2,7,8).

Students' knowledge of sexual harassment is relatively good. However, it still needs improvement, and the majority of respondents have experienced at least one form of sexual harassment, such as unwanted sexual attention and gender-based violence, perpetrated by both known and unknown individuals (9). There is a gap between the actions taken and the knowledge about sexual harassment (2,10). The study found that gender, age, experiences of sexual harassment, and attitudes toward gender roles are factors that influence knowledge about sexual harassment (9). This study also found that women—who predominantly tended to respond with anger and demonstrated higher levels of expertise—those who had experienced at least one form of sexual harassment, individuals aged 21 years or older, and those who support gender role equality, also showed higher attitudes of tolerating/supporting sexual harassment compared to men (6,9). This may occur due to biological factors, as men and women differ in how they regulate emotional responses, with women tending to be more expressive in conveying their feelings. Therefore, when they are spontaneously confronted with sexual harassment stimuli from an unfamiliar person, they are more likely to become angry. In contrast, if the behaviour is carried out by someone they know, they tend to be more tolerant (11). The researcher intends to examine adolescents' knowledge and attitudes toward sexual harassment within the educational context.

METHOD

This study employed a non-experimental, quantitative, correlational, descriptive approach with a cross-sectional design to explore adolescents' understanding of sexual harassment in the education sector. The study received ethical approval from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Medicine, Universitas Sriwijaya, with Certificate of Ethical Approval Protocol No: 032-2024. A total of 1,266 adolescents aged 15 to 24 years participated in the study, drawn from senior high schools, general and health vocational schools, and public and Islamic universities in South Sumatra. Samples were selected using a non-random convenience sampling technique. The researchers coordinated with teachers and lecturers, then approached potential respondents in classrooms, explained the study's purpose, and invited them to participate. Prospective respondents were informed of their voluntary participation and that the researchers would maintain the confidentiality of the information they shared. Respondents completed paper-based questionnaires in class and returned them to the

data collectors on the same day. The variables explored and analysed in this study included socio-demographic characteristics such as gender and age; knowledge of sexual harassment, assessed using the Sexual Harassment Definition Questionnaire; experiences of sexual harassment, measured using the Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (SEQ); and attitudes toward gender roles, explored using the Sexual Harassment Attitude Scale.

The Sexual Harassment Definition Questionnaire demonstrated validity coefficients ranging from 0.62 to 0.80, indicating that all items were valid. The reliability values, calculated using the Kuder–Richardson 20 and 21 (KR) formulas, were KR-20 = 0.80639 and KR-21 = 0.79941, demonstrating that the instrument was reliable for use. (6). The final form of the SEQ consists of 28 items, of which 7 measure gender harassment (Level 1), 5 measure seductive behaviour (Level 2), and 4 items each focus on sexual bribery and sexual coercion (Levels 3 and 4). Seven items are designed to measure the general domain of sexual harassment, along with criterion items. Initial psychometric analyses, using Cronbach's coefficient (α), produced an internal consistency coefficient of 0.92 for the complete questionnaire at the item level in University Sample 1 ($N = 1395$); the α coefficient calculated for University Sample 2 was comparable. Test–retest stability conducted on a small subsample of graduate students from university 1 ($N = 46$) yielded a stability coefficient of 0.86 over two weeks. The corrected split-half reliability coefficients for the five SEQ ‘scales’ ranged from 0.62 to 0.86, with an average of 0.75 (12). The Attitude Toward Harassment Scale demonstrated validity values ranging from 0.68 to 0.88, indicating that all items were valid. The reliability values, calculated using the Kuder–Richardson 20 and 21 (KR) formulas, were KR-20 = 0.72450 and KR-21 = 0.71845, confirming the scale’s reliability for use (6).

Initial data analysis using univariate tests produced descriptive statistics on the distributions of the variables examined. Subsequently, bivariate tests were performed to investigate the relationships between age, gender, living with parents, sources of information about sexual harassment in educational settings, adolescents’ attitudes toward sexual harassment, and respondents’ experiences with sexual harassment. The bivariate analysis was carried out using the Chi-square test with a significance level of $p < 0.05$. Simple multiple regression was applied to examine the relationship between independent variables—such as demographic characteristics, experiences of sexual harassment, and adolescents’ attitudes toward sexual harassment—and the dependent variable, namely knowledge about sexual harassment. Multivariate regression analysis enabled the assessment of the relationship between each independent variable and the dependent variable, while controlling for the effects of the other independent variables. The researchers conducted a pre-regression analysis to test the assumption of linearity as a prerequisite for multiple regression. This step used bivariate testing to determine which variables to include in the model, selecting those with $p < 0.25$.

RESULTS

Table 1
Respondent Characteristics (n=1266)

No	Variable	Frequency	Percentage
1	Age		
	<19	797	63.0
	≥19	469	37.0
2	Gender		
	Female	883	69.7
	Male	383	30.3
3	Living in the same house with parents		
	Yes	1015	80.2
	No	251	19.8
4	Source of information regarding sexual violence in the education sector		
	None	951	75.1
	Exists	315	24.9
5	Summary of Respondents' Knowledge		
	Insufficient understanding	303	23.9
	Excellent understanding	963	76.1
Categorization of knowledge related to types of sexual violence			

No	Variable	Frequency	Percentage
	verbal	1063	84.0
	non verbal	203	16.0
6	Respondents' Attitude Overview		
	Support or tolerate form/behavior of sexual harassment	128	10.1
	Do Not Support Or Tolerate Any Form Of Behavior sexual harassment	1138	89.9
7	Respondents' experiences of sexual harassment		
	Sexual Harassed	941	74.3
	a Sexual coercion	50	3.9
	b Unwanted sexual attention	210	16.6
	c Gender harassment	681	53.8
	Not abused	325	25.7

Based on Table 1, the dominant characteristics of the respondents were being under 19 years old (63%), female (69.7%), living with their parents (80.2%), and having never been exposed to educational materials on sexual harassment (75.1%). Good knowledge (76.1%) was the most common knowledge category among the respondents. It can be concluded that subjects have a high level of understanding or knowledge of various forms of sexual harassment if they obtain a high overall score. The subjects' knowledge of the types of behaviours or descriptions of sexual harassment decreases as their scores become lower.

Table 2.

The relationship between the variables of age, gender, living in the same house with parents, sources of information about sexual harassment in the educational area, attitudes, and experiences related to sexual harassment perceived by respondents with knowledge about sexual harassment (n=1266).

	knowledge about sexual harassment	Variable independen		Variable dependen					
		<19		≥19		Total		OR	P value
		n	%	n	%	n	%		
	Insufficient understanding	243	80.2	60	19.8	303	100	2,990	0,000
	Excellent understanding	554	57.5	409	42.5	963	100		
	Total	797	63.0	469	37.0	1266	100		
	knowledge about sexual harassment	Female		Male		Total		OR	P value
		n	%	n	%	n	%		
		156	51.5	147	48.5	303	100		
	Insufficient understanding	727	75.5	236	24.5	963	100	0,344	0,000
	Excellent understanding	883	69.7	383	30.3	1266	100		
	Total								
	knowledge about sexual harassment	Yes		No		Living in the same house with parents		OR	P value
		n	%	n	%	n	%		
		265	87.5	38	12.5	303	100		
	Insufficient understanding	750	77.9	213	22.1	963	100	1,981	0,000
	Excellent understanding	1015	80.2	251	19.8	1266	100		
	Total								
	knowledge about sexual harassment	None		Exists		Total		OR	P value
		N	%	N	%	N	%		
		200	66	103	34	303	100		
	Insufficient understanding	751	78	212	22	963	100	0,548	0,000
	Excellent understanding	951	75.1	315	24.9	1266	100		
	Total								
	knowledge about sexual harassment	Support or tolerate form/behavior of sexual harassment		Do Not Support Or Tolerate Any Form Of Behavior sexual harassment		Total		OR	P value
		N	%	N	%	N	%		
		128	10.1	1138	89.9				
	knowledge about sexual harassment	Sexual Harassment Attitude		95 % CI				Lower	Upper
		N	%	N	%	N	%		
		128	10.1	1138	89.9				

Variable independen			Variable dependen							
knowledge about sexual harassment	Insufficient understanding	200	66	103	34	303	100	1,333	0,200	0,888
	Excellent understanding	751	78	212	22	963	100	0,851	0,311	1,138
	Total	951	75.1	315	24.9	1266	100			2,001
			Sexual Experience							
knowledge about sexual harassment	Sexual Harassed	N	%	Not abused	N	%	Total	N	%	OR
	Insufficient understanding	218	71.9	85	28.1	303	100			P value
	Excellent understanding	723	75.1	240	24.9	963	100	0,851	0,311	0,637
			Total	N	%	1266	100			95 % CI
knowledge about sexual harassment										Lower
										Upper

Based on Table 2, it was found that the highest level of good knowledge was observed among respondents aged <19 years (57.5%), female respondents (75.5%), respondents living with their parents (77.9%), respondents who were unaware of sources of information on sexual harassment in educational settings (78%), those with attitudes supporting sexual harassment (78%), and respondents with experiences of being harassed (75.1%). There was a significant relationship between age, gender, living with parents, sources of information on sexual harassment in educational settings, and knowledge about sexual harassment. In addition, individuals aged <19 years had a 2.990-fold risk, females had a 0.344-fold risk, those living with their parents had a 1.981-fold risk, and those without sources of information about sexual harassment in education had a 0.548-fold risk of having better knowledge.

Table 3
The Final Modeling Used Multiple Logistic Regression

Variable	B	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I. for EXP(B)		Sig. Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients	Nagelkerke R Square
				Lower	Upper		
Age	0.946	0.000	2.575	1.875	3.536	0,000	0,122
Gender	-0.906	0.000	0.404	0.306	0.533		
Source of information regarding sexual violence in the education sector	-0.438	0.004	0.645	0.480	0.867		
Constant	1.714	0.000	5.554				

After conducting the bivariate selection for inclusion in the multivariate model, only the variables age, gender, living with parents, sources of information about sexual harassment in educational settings, and adolescents' attitudes toward sexual harassment were included because their p-values were < 0.25. The final modelling results are presented in Table 3. In the final model, the variables significantly associated with knowledge about sexual harassment were age, gender, and sources of information about sexual harassment in educational settings. The resulting model was deemed appropriate, as indicated by the omnibus test ($p = 0.000$). According to the Nagelkerke R Square value of 0.122, the independent variables in the model explained 12.2% of the variation in knowledge about sexual harassment. The most dominant variable associated with knowledge about sexual harassment was age, with an OR of 2.575 (95% CI: 1.875–3.536), indicating that adolescents aged 19 years and above were 2.575 times more likely to have good knowledge than adolescents aged under 19 years.

DISCUSSION

Sexual harassment is an epidemic across global higher education systems, with significant impacts on individuals, groups, and entire organizations due to unsafe working conditions, hierarchical structures, the normalization of gender-based violence, toxic academic masculinity, a culture of silence, lack of active leadership, higher education in countries with weak education systems, low levels of accountability, high rates of poverty, gender inequality, and institutions with undertrained, underpaid, and under-resourced educator (2,13–15). The results of this study demonstrate that more adolescents do not support the existence of sexual

harassment and that more of them experience gender-based harassment. Other studies have found similar results, with two-thirds of respondents reporting having experienced sexual harassment in the past three months; of these, 64.7% reported “visual/verbal” harassment behaviours, such as sexual jokes, and 34.3% reported “invasive contact/personal” behaviours, such as sexual touching. In addition, respondents were unsure whether they had ever experienced sexual harassment behaviours and were unaware that they had experienced most of these behaviours. The victims are typically women, LGBTQ+ individuals (Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans, Queer, and Asexual), and those who share a room or do not live with their parents (3,16–19). Many factors influence and prevent the occurrence of sexual harassment, including age, knowledge, style of dress, environment, and the lack of sex education from parents regarding the types or forms of sexual harassment and ways to prevent it. Parents who live in the same household as adolescents and have a high level of education (OR: 0.95, 95% CI: 0.90–0.99) (20,21). The study’s findings show that the majority of cases occur in urban areas and involve perpetrators known to the victims, including family members, coworkers, neighbours, and playmates (22).

Other studies indicate that sexual harassment is caused by a lack of awareness about sexual harassment among university stakeholders, students’ backgrounds, poverty, and a culture of silence. Sexual harassment is a violation of human rights. It has various negative consequences, with forms of harassment including unwanted sexual attention such as touching the body, groping, kissing, hugging, staring, or telling obscene jokes without the victim’s consent (23). More female students experience various forms of sexual harassment, and they are more likely to recognise different types of verbal harassment because they have a broader definition of harassment, tend to be less tolerant of abusive behaviour, perceive themselves as less familiar with sexual harassment reporting guidelines, and feel that perpetrators face no consequences for their actions. However, they are more hesitant to report sexual harassment compared to male students (24). The confusion experienced by victims of sexual harassment is caused by several factors, such as the level of pressure, persistence, and physical strength, the closeness between the perpetrator and the victim, and how the perpetrator perceives the purpose of interacting with the victim (16).

The knowledge referred to in this study is the process and outcome of young women’s understanding of violence against women and its impact on reproductive health, including the definition of violence against women, the forms of violence, the factors influencing such violence, and its impact on reproductive health. This study found that the majority of respondents had good knowledge of sexual harassment in educational settings. These results are consistent with previous research, which found that age has a significant relationship with discrimination and sexual harassment, as younger women experience discrimination and harassment more frequently. This may occur because they are often less aware of their surroundings and tend to be more reserved (25). Other research findings indicate a relationship between knowledge and sexual harassment, with the majority of adolescent girls having poor knowledge (17 individuals, 48.6%) and experiencing mild sexual harassment (2 individuals, 5.7%), moderate violence (8 individuals, 22.9%), and severe violence (7 individuals, 20.0%) (26,27). Similar results were found in another study, where the majority of respondents with knowledge of dating violence had good knowledge (18 individuals, 43%), adequate knowledge (16 individuals, 38%), and poor knowledge (8 individuals, 19%) (28). Another study showed that some

respondents still did not know who qualifies as a stranger (74.2%) and what is permissible or not permissible to do toward the opposite sex (64.5%) in relation to knowledge about perpetrators of sexual harassment (29).

This study demonstrated that age is the factor most strongly influencing knowledge, with individuals aged 19 or older more likely to have higher levels of expertise. Another study found that participants aged 18–21 fall into the late adolescent category, which is generally characterised by higher intellectual capacity, critical thinking skills, responsible behaviour, and increased awareness—factors that contribute to more informed knowledge and attitudes toward sexual harassment (30). Overall, young women's knowledge about sexual harassment falls into the good category because most of them are at a more mature age. This is because increasing age can lead to changes in both the physical and psychological aspects of an individual (27). Age influences a person's ability to comprehend, think, and behave; therefore, as a person gets older, their comprehension, mindset, and attitudes become more mature. The maturation of brain structures and broader social interactions enables adolescents to develop more advanced knowledge and attitudes (31).

The existence of a cultural norm among adolescents that normalises sexual harassment—where sexuality is still considered taboo to discuss publicly—can sociologically be seen as a failure in the construction of adolescent sexuality. This includes sexual knowledge among adolescents that permits sexual harassment to occur and treats it as a form of joking (32). Adolescents should already understand the concept of a healthy teen relationship, which involves not harming one another and understanding boundaries within the relationship, including physical, psychological, social, and sexual well-being (33). The environment is one of the external factors that influences a person's knowledge. Knowledge will be good if the environment is supportive, and it will be poor if the environment is not. Within their environment, individuals gain experiences that shape their thinking (34). Adolescents spend more time with their peers than with their parents, making it essential to foster quality relationships with parents, parental closeness, and religious understanding to reduce the likelihood of adolescents engaging in sexual activities. Good communication with parents about sex also reduces the influence and pressure from sexually active peers (35). Suppose violence frequently occurs in their environment and they are often exposed to it, over time. In that case, it becomes normalised, and adolescents no longer recognise it as an act of violence, eventually leading them to engage in such behaviour (36). The high prevalence of sexual harassment among students in this study may be a consequence of limited knowledge about the legal framework. Therefore, institutional programs such as classroom psychoeducation sessions, peer training, or national awareness campaigns need to be established to enhance students' understanding of the legal framework regarding sexual harassment and how to respond to such acts, both as victims and witnesses, as well as how to provide the necessary psychological support (35).

Sexual prevention programs for adolescents consist of prevention through early sex education, as well as parental supervision and caregiving through interventions using school-based sex education curricula, the use of play media and educational games, mixed interventions, support groups, and workshops. These programs also emphasise strengthening the role of parents as educators, role models, companions, counsellors, and communicators, as well as initiating programs to build a safe and positive learning environment supported by ongoing counselling and informed by in-depth multi-stakeholder studies on the status of sexual harassment at the university (15,22,35–40). A cultural approach is also needed for prevention, as shown in other studies,

NatOsba., Et Al 50

which state that providing interventions through health education based on local wisdom, such as Naposo Nauli Bulung (NNB), and videos in the Palembang language, is an effective method of health education to improve adolescents' knowledge, attitudes, and practices (41–44). The research findings indicate that shame stemming from social and cultural stigma also needs to be considered as a reference in formulating policies for the prevention and follow-up of sexual harassment prevention efforts. In addition to the urgency of establishing regulations or special task forces, universities must also provide space, time, and services to ensure the safety of victims, both physically and psychologically (45). Greater public attention should be given to sexual harassment by strengthening both litigation and non-litigation efforts, as well as by educating parents, children, and the community about sexuality (16).

CONCLUSION

There is a significant relationship between knowledge and age, gender, living with parents, and sources of information about sexual harassment within educational settings (*p*-value < 0.05). The most dominant variable related to knowledge about sexual harassment is age, with an OR of 2.575 (95% CI OR: 1.875–3.536), meaning that adolescents over the age of 19 are 2.575 times more likely to have low knowledge compared to those under 19. Support from the government and the community is needed to improve the knowledge of children, adolescents, and parents about the prevention of sexual harassment from an early age, carried out continuously and aligned with cultural values.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would like to express their gratitude to all parties who contributed to this study, including all nursing students involved in the research, the institutions that supported this study, and the respondents for their participation.

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Natosba., Et Al 51

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