

Adolescences experience of gender-based violence: a qualitative study

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ABSTRACT

Violence towards women is a serious global problem which can affect mental, physical, sexual dan reproductive health. This study aimed to explore adolescents' experiences of gender-based violence. This study used a qualitative phenomenology design to assess the adolescent's experience of gender-based violence. The participants were 15 female adolescents aged 15-18. Participants were interviewed using semi-structured in-depth interviews. The qualitative data obtained were transcribed and analyzed using the Colaizzi approach. The results were structured into four themes according to the adolescent experiences of violence. The themes were the violence experienced; Victim's efforts to deal with the violent incident; Barriers to not reporting or telling others; hope and desire for violence prevention. This study highlights that almost the majority of female adolescent was disclosed to tell other people about incidents of violence. Adolescents tend to feel self-blame and consider that the violent behavior happened because of their fault. This finding emphasized the intervention to resolved the unmet need to facilitate reporting of gender-based violence by victimized adolescents. The interventions must address the stigma, increase community understanding about taboos, and promote gender-based violence education at the school, family, and societal levels.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Violence towards women is a serious global problem which can affect mental, physical, sexual dan reproductive health [1]. Adolescents are at particular risk of being exposed to violence. Data in Indonesia shows that the majority of victims of violence are women (79.6%), and the most victim of violence aged 13-17 years (31.6%). The National Commission on Women said there was increased in violence against women throughout 2021 in Indonesia. Even, World Health Organization called gender based violence as "global pandemic" [2]. Violence against women negatively impacts their lives. The condition could lead to mental health problems such as depression, anxiety disorders [3], [4], physical injury [5], sexual and reproductive health problems and unplanned pregnancy [6].

Violence experienced by female and male adolescents is different and increases health risks in adolescents [7]. Adolescents often experience violence in multiple forms, for example, as a victim or witnessing violence [8], including peer victimization and dating violence [9]. The violence experienced by female adolescents increases the risk of developing psychiatric problems such as perceived stress, depressed mood, and suicidality [10], [11]. It also affects personal and social development problems into adulthood [12], and in

the longterm affect socioeconomic status through academic performance, educational attainment, labor force participation, occupational status, and earnings in early adulthood [13], [14]. Understanding how violence against female adolescents can occur and the consequences that may occur to the female adolescents who are victims is vital to prevent problems that arise in the future.

Most survivors of sexual violence never report their cases to various reasons such as embarrassment, fear of being blamed, insufficient evidence, not being supported by their families, and intimidation by perpetrators [15], [16]. A previous study stated that community norms had a significant relationship with experiences of violence [17]. Indonesia is a country that adheres to a patriarchal culture that elevates the position of women to an inferior position. The patriarchal culture of gender injustice in society makes women often obtain negative labels from society [18], [19]. One of the problems related to society's strong traditions and culture that still perpetuate gender stereotypes is Victim blaming [20]. The victims usually were subjected to blaming social sanctions from the community, including friends, neighbors, and social media users [21]. The problems caused women to keep silent because of fear of being stigmatized by society and preventing them from seeking health care.

The main challenge in dealing with violence against women and children in Indonesia is the availability of comprehensive data and information on violence against women and children. Understanding gender-based violence from adolescent experience is necessary to address the main public health concern. World Health Organization also set the goal priority of sustainable development goal (SDG) 5 on gender equality and women's empowerment (specifically, SDG 5.2 on the elimination of violence against women and girls). A limited study qualitatively explored the adolescents' experiences of gender-based violence. Through qualitative research, this study aimed to explore adolescents' experiences of gender-based violence.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1. Study design

This study used a qualitative phenomenology design. This study aimed to assess the adolescent's experience of gender-based violence. The experience of female adolescent was explored by semi-in-depth interview.

2.2. Participants

Participants were 15 female adolescents. They were aged 15–18, able to express their experience of witnessing or experiencing violence and willing to participate in the study. The participants were chosen by targeted purposive sampling.

2.3. Data collection

Participants were recruited by distributing a G-Form regarding whether female adolescents had witnessed or experienced violence. Because the research topic is sensitive, we also informed the participants that the confidentiality principle is applied and that participants' names were written in initial form. The participants and their parents were informed about the purpose of the interview by phone and then contacted to obtain informed consent from their parents. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted through a zoom meeting at a time agreed upon by the researcher and prospective participants. Zoom was used to collect qualitative data because of its relative ease of use, cost-effectiveness, data management features, and security options [22].

The interview question guide is an opening question: "What do you think violence is? Please tell us about your experience as a victim/witness of violent behaviour?". Then the next question is, "Please tell me how you felt during this incident? What efforts did you make to overcome this incident? What obstacles did you experience in overcoming this incident? What do you think is the role of your family in preventing this incident? What do you think is the role of your peers in preventing this from happening? What do you think is the role of your school in preventing this incident? What do you think the role of other people/other things in preventing this from happening? What are your expectations regarding the rise of violence against women today?"

Interviews were conducted for approximately 40-60 minutes with each participant. Based on adolescents' consent, all interviews were audio-recorded. Audio recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and verified for accuracy and completeness by DT and IP. For all interviews conducted in Bahasa.

2.4. Ethical consideration

This research has received ethical approval from the health ethics committee of the Faculty of Nursing, Universitas Airlangga, Number: 2651-KEPK. All participants were informed that if information concerning their health or general situation concerned the interviewer, steps had to be taken in agreement with the adolescent to ensure they received adequate help and guidance.

2.5. Data analysis

The qualitative data were analyzed using the Colaizzi method. The analysis step described the phenomenon studied in this study: violence against female adolescents. The second step was collecting descriptions of phenomena through participant opinions by conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews and pouring in verbatim form. The third step was reading all descriptions of phenomena that participants delivered by repeatedly reading the transcript. The fourth step was rereading the interview transcript and quoting meaningful statements by marking the keywords in the transcript. The fifth step was outlining the meaning of significant statements to find the essence or meaning of the keywords to form categories. The sixth step was organizing a collection of meanings formulated into groups of themes by reading all existing categories and comparing and looking for similarities between these categories. The final step was similar grouping categories into sub-themes and themes. The researcher assembles the themes found during the data analysis process and writes them into a description in the form of research results.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Result

The number of participants in this study was 15 female adolescents. Most of female adolescents aged 15–18 years, from public schools (73.4%) and living in urban areas (53.4%), the details are shown in Table 1. This study found four themes: experienced violence, victim efforts to deal with the incident, barriers to not reporting or telling others and hope and desire for violence prevention, see Table 2.

Table 1 Demographic characteristics of adolescents

Participant	Age (years)	School type	Domicile
P1	15	Public	Urban
P2	15	Private	Urban
P3	15	Public	Urban
P4	16	Public	Urban
P5	15	Private	Urban
P6	18	Public	Urban
P7	16	Public	Rural
P8	16	Private	Rural
P9	17	Public	Urban
P10	18	Public	Rural
P11	15	Public	Rural
P12	16	Public	Urban
P13	15	Private	Rural
P14	18	Public	Rural
P15	17	Public	Rural

3.1.1. Theme 1: Experienced violence

– Sub Theme: Type of violence

Participants said they experienced sexual, verbal, physical, social, and violence through the Internet. Sexual violence experienced by female adolescents such as touching their genitals, holding their breasts, and kissing them forcefully, as stated by participants as follows:

"When I went to my grandmother's house, there was one who was boarding there, and the man touched my private part." (P5)

"...there was a male passing by, suddenly hold my breasts ..." (P6)

"...my boyfriend forced to kiss me, and threatened if I did not want to, then I would be beaten ..." (P8)

Female adolescents reported of being verbal abused. Verbal violence experienced by participants in the form of being made fun of and humiliated in front of other people as stated by participants as follows:

"...my classmates often make fun of me being fat." (P3)

"...one of my teachers once said I was stupid in front of my friends ..." (P14)

Female adolescents said that they also being physically abused by their family member and their classmates. Physical violence experienced by participants in the form of being slapped, pinched, and kicked as stated by participants as follows:

"...my father often hit me, sometimes pinched me when I made a mistake as small as possible..." (P2, P8)

"...my classmate once kicked and grabbed me because I dropped his cellphone." (P13)

An adolescent reported that she was socially limited by their family. The social violence experienced by the participants is the limitation of social activities as stated by the participants as follows:

"...my father restricts whatever I do, even I can't have friends with some classmates ..." (P6)

Violence through social media also reported by some adolescents in this study. The violence through the internet experienced by participants was in the form of humiliation and ridicule through social media and group chats as stated by the participants as follows:

"... my friends often insult my photos on Instagram, they often write harsh words ..." (P11, P3)

"...sometimes in the chat group class, when I write something, it's always not considered and it is like being insulted..." (P10)

Table 2 Theme Derivation

Theme	Sub-theme	Category	Keyword
Experienced violence	Kind of violence	Sexual violence	Hold my private parts; holding my breast; force kiss
		Verbal violence	Speak harshly; humiliate
		Social violence	Set up friendship
		Cyberbullying	Write insults on social media
	Perpetrator	Stranger	Stranger man
		Family	Father; brother; uncle
		Friend	Class friend
		Hidden place	Covered with boxes; quiet room
	Characteristics of the place	Quiet place	When there's no one
		Internet	Instagram
		Group chat	Group chat
	Psychological response	Confused	Confused how to do
		Worried	Worried
		Afraid	Afraid
Angry		Angry	
Startled		Startled	
Run		Run in front of my grandma's house	
Victim efforts to deal with the incident	Stay away	Run	
	Passive	Silent	
	Cry	Cry	
Barriers to not reporting or telling others	Hiding	Hide	Stored alone; enough for me to know
		I'm also just keeping my feelings to myself	
	Feeling self-blame	Self-blaming	I'm wrong
	Afraid	Afraid	Afraid to tell
	Shame	Embarrassed	I am embarrassed
	Did not know how	How to	Don't know how to convey it
	Victim blaming	Blaming the victim	Women who are always more disadvantaged; woman to blame
	Afraid of family disruption	Family suffering	Afraid they (family) will suffer too
		Family burdensome	Their burden (family) is also heavy
	Family sadness	Family sadness	If i tell them later, they will think, later they will be sad
Other behavior		Everyone goes through this (happen), others get through it when you don't	
Comparing to other	Had no one to be told	Had no one to be told	
	Have no friends to talk to	Have no friends to talk to	
Hope and desire for violence prevention	Decrease the stigma	Don't know who to tell	Don't know who to tell
		Remove taboo	Remove taboo
	Safety environment	Without worrying about what other people think	Without worrying about what other people think
		Free in the community,	Free in the community,
	Express my heart with relief	Express my heart with relief	
	School environment active to prevent	Teacher should inform about violence	Teacher should inform about violence
		Teacher should approach us to explore our feeling of violence	Teacher should approach us to explore our feeling of violence
Parenting issue	Parents to be closer to their children	Parents to be closer to their children	
	Parents better understand what violence is	Parents better understand what violence is	

– Sub theme: The perpetrator

This study found that the perpetrators are various. Participants stated that the perpetrators of sexual violence were strangers, fathers, older brothers, uncles, and classmates, as stated by the participants as follows:

"...There's a stranger male, I don't know, suddenly grabbed my breast..." (P6)

"... (My) father did..." (P2, P6)

"...(My) classmate who laughs at me..." (P13, P14)

– Sub theme: Characteristics of the place

The place characteristics where the violence happened are also various. Participants said that the places where violence was committed were in the form of Hidden places, Quiet places, the Internet, and classes, as stated by participants as follows:

"...at that time behind the house, many boxes were covering..." (P5)

"...when there is no one at all..." (P5, P6)

"...on my Instagram..." (P11)

"...In the classroom when there is no teacher..." (P13)

– Sub theme: Psychological responses

Participants reported various emotional responses. Participants felt confused, worried, afraid, and angry when experiencing or witnessing violence, as stated by the participants as follows:

"...I confused what to do..." (P6)

"...I am worried...because it's often done..." (14)

"...at that time, I was scared ..." (P5)

"...inside my heart, I am outraged ..." (P11)

"...At first, I was shocked..." (P5, P6)

3.1.2. Theme 2: The victims' efforts to deal with the incident

Participants respond to incidents of violence with various different responses. Participants conveyed the efforts made when experiencing or witnessing violence in the form of staying away, Passive, Hiding, and self-blaming, which were conveyed participants as follows:

"...At that time, I immediately ran to the house..." (P5)

"...I just kept quiet..." (P10)

"...I hide my feelings..." (P14)

"...I only blame myself for doing something wrong..." (P3)

3.1.3. Theme 3: Barriers to not reporting or telling others

Almost all participants stated reporting the incident to no one. Participants stated the perceived obstacles to reporting or telling others, namely afraid, shame, did not know how, victim blaming, afraid of family disruption, comparing to others, had no one to be told, as stated by participants as follows:

"...I feel afraid to talk..." (P5)

"...I feel embarrassed to tell other people..." (P6)

"...I confused on how to tell the story..." (P5, P2)

"...because it's usually women who are blamed, so I don't tell them..." (P5, P7)

"... later when I tell my parents, I'm afraid they will feel burdened..." (P5)

"...I am afraid to make my parents feel sad or think after I tell (them)..." (P5, P9)

3.1.4. Theme 4: Hope and desire for violence prevention

Participants expressed their hopes for preventing violence. Participants believed that negative vies of society towards victims impacted victim behavior to not reporting the incidents. Their hope was decreasing the stigma in the form of norms and culture, and community perception as conveyed by participants as follows:

"...I wish these people didn't have a negative view of the victim..." (P5, P6)

Some participants convey the desire to have a safe environment for women. Participants want to be no longer afraid to walk at night, to be free to wear comfortable clothes and to feel safe wherever they are.

Participants expressed their hopes for preventing violence, namely the Safety environment, which was conveyed by participants as follows:

"...want to have a safe environment, so we as women are not worried when going out alone..."
(P5, P6, P15)

Participants said that bullying still occurs in the school environment. The participants hopes that there were some programs to prevent bullying in schools. Participants expressed their hopes for violence prevention, namely School environment active to prevent in terms of Educate about violence and approach students actively, as stated by participants as follows:

"...schools should also actively participate in preventing violence against women, for example giving information about what violence is..." (P10)
"...the teacher is more active in approaching us students, asking what happened to us..." (P14)

The participants in this study experienced violence in the family. Adolescent hopes that there is a program to increase parental understanding about communication, parenting style and increasing the parents and children closeness. Participants expressed their hopes for preventing violence, namely Parenting issues in the form of Parent-child closeness and Parent knowledge about violence, as stated by participants as follows:

"... the closeness of children and parents seems necessary, so that the story is free..." (P4)
"...sometimes parents don't understand what violence is, so, if possible, parents also need to be informed..." (P6)

3.2. Discussion

This study highlights that almost the majority of female adolescents do not tell other people about incidents of violence. Another study states that most victims of violence do not tell others [23] toward teachers [24], parents or friends. Adolescents in this study reported hiding the incidents that they considered embarrassing from others. The results of previous research indicated that adolescents tend to be closed in certain aspects of others [25]. Families and those closest to adolescents need to recognize the signs and symptoms shown by female adolescents who are victims of violence. Frequently reported barriers to disclosure were stigma, fear of parents/authority figures, consideration of discussion about sex as taboo, and fear of perpetrators [23], fear of consequences to self was the most common reason for disclosure delay in female adolescents [26]. These findings indicate the need to develop methods or efforts to deal with the disclosure in female adolescents who experience problems with violence. Reducing the stigma of victims of violence needs to be done so that victims feel more open in expressing their problems. Increasing parental knowledge and parent-child communication also needs to be done.

The violence experienced by adolescents in this study was in the form of sexual violence (holding vital organs, holding breasts), verbal violence (abusive words), and social violence (peer violence), and through the internet such as social media. A prior study has identified interpersonal violence (a broad term that includes stalking, harassment, sexual assault, and physical dating violence) as a major problem among adolescents [27]. Violence experienced by female adolescent can increase the risk of psychological distress and suicide attempts [28]. Various forms of violence experienced by female adolescents show that gender-based violence still happens a lot in female adolescents. There needs to be action to encourage gender equality and empower female adolescents [29], especially in preventing and overcoming violence. In addition to the support from family [30], it is also necessary to prevent violence against female adolescents at the family level.

Norms and culture in Indonesia are patriarchal, as evidenced by male dominance and female submissiveness. The patriarchy influences values in society, including the adolescent's mindset. It is signified that as adolescents, females believe that males are superior to them [31]. The social norms identified have both a direct and indirect relation to the practice of physical violence. The relationship is indirect when the norm does not explicitly relate to the practice but contributes to the shared behavioral expectation of perpetrating physical violence [32]. Need to conduct shifting collective norms around gender inequity, particularly at the community and peer levels [33]. This activity requires intervention at the community level through positive activities that encourage gender equality in society, directly or through the mass media and online media.

Adolescents are bullied oftenly because of something they are already sensitive about, such as a physical attribute. In other cases, the mistreatment may be an accusation about something they did. Either way, they will often be too embarrassed to discuss it with anyone. Adolescents tend to feel self-blame and consider the bullying happening because of their fault. Shame concerns one's entire being abuse-related shame would be expected to cause the individual to feel shame in response to everyday adverse events to a much higher degree.

4. CONCLUSION

This study highlights that almost the majority of female adolescent was disclosed to tell other people about incidents of violence. Adolescents tend to feel self-blame and consider that the violent behavior happened because of their fault. This finding emphasized the intervention to resolved the unmet need to facilitate reporting of gender-based violence by victimized adolescents. The interventions must address the stigma, increase community understanding about taboos, and promote gender-based violence education at the school, family, and societal levels.

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