

Conscious Silence: A Critical Analysis of First-Year Students' Self-Awareness of Sexual Violence in the University Context

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Abstract

Sexual violence in higher education constitutes a multidimensional problem that extends beyond regulatory and policy frameworks to encompass students' psychological processes, particularly during the critical transition into university life. This study critically examines first-year students' self-awareness of sexual violence in the university context and conceptualizes conscious silence as a distinct psychological response situated between awareness and agency, drawing on a Guidance and Counseling perspective. Employing a quantitative descriptive-analytic design, data were collected from 352 first-year students at Universitas PGRI Kanjuruhan Malang during the 2025–2026 academic year using a Guttman-scale questionnaire assessing awareness, perceptions, lived experiences, contributory factors, and institutional services and policies related to sexual violence. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including percentage distributions and response tendency patterns. The findings reveal a paradoxical condition of being aware but not empowered. While a majority of students (64.2%) had never participated in sexual violence prevention training and only 40.2% demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of sexual violence forms, a substantial proportion (82.4%) reported having witnessed or heard about sexual violence incidents, frequently responding with silence. These results indicate that silence functions not as ignorance, but as a psychologically informed yet constrained response shaped by limited agency, perceived risk, and insufficient response competencies.

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INTRODUCTION

Sexual violence in higher education represents a persistent structural problem and has become a global concern across educational, gender, and social psychological scholarship (Bonar et al., 2022). Universities, normatively positioned as safe spaces for intellectual development and character formation (Callan, 2016), frequently function as sites of asymmetrical power relations that enable multiple forms of sexual violence, encompassing both physical and non-physical acts (Pinchevsky et al., 2020). International evidence consistently demonstrates a relatively high prevalence of sexual violence within university settings, while reporting rates remain disproportionately low (Dworkin et al., 2021). This disparity points to a fundamental problem that extends beyond institutional reporting mechanisms, implicating the

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psychological awareness, perceived agency, and positionality of individuals embedded within these academic systems.

In Indonesia, sexual violence in university settings has gained increasing scholarly and public attention over the past five years, alongside a rise in case disclosures through media coverage and state-affiliated institutions (Masriah et al., 2024). Data from the ministry of women's empowerment and child protection indicate that the majority of sexual violence cases in higher education remain unreported through formal channels, primarily due to fear, stigma, power asymmetries, and a lack of trust in campus-based response mechanisms (Fajria, 2022). This situation demonstrates that the presence of regulations and institutional policies alone is insufficient to foster individuals' willingness to speak out, thereby underscoring the need for a deeper examination of the psychological factors that shape silence in the face of sexual violence (Sagala, 2020).

Universities function not only as academic spaces but also as psychosocial developmental environments that require systematic support through guidance and counseling services (Cerolini et al., 2023). From a guidance and counseling perspective, university students are viewed as individuals navigating the developmental tasks of early adulthood, including identity formation, emotional regulation, moral decision-making, and the capacity to establish healthy social relationships (Lapsley & Hardy, 2017). When the university environment instead becomes a site of sexual violence, the issue extends beyond legal or policy concerns and emerges as a developmental and psychological well-being problem that falls squarely within the professional domain of guidance and counseling (Rahimsyah & Muhajirin, 2025). Within this framework, experiences or threats of sexual violence may generate anxiety, guilt, helplessness, and distorted perceptions of the self and the environment (Guyon et al., 2024). Such conditions often remain unarticulated in formal reports, manifesting instead as silence, withdrawal, or the normalization of harmful experiences by students (Utami et al., 2023).

First-year students represent a particularly salient population in guidance and counseling research, as they occupy a critical transitional phase from late adolescence to early adulthood (Robbani & Nafisatuzzahra, 2025). During this period, individuals are still developing self-concept, self-regulation, and self-awareness as foundational capacities for adaptive decision-making (Rahmayanti et al., 2024). In the context of sexual violence, limited or problematic self-awareness may hinder first-year students' ability to recognize personal boundaries, identify risky situations, and determine appropriate responses (Indah, 2025). From a Guidance and Counseling standpoint, this condition reflects unmet needs for preventive and developmental services (Bhakti, 2017).

Guidance and counseling does not conceptualize students' silence in response to sexual violence as mere passivity, but rather as an expression of complex internal psychological processes (Rahayu et al., 2024). Silence may function as a defense mechanism, a temporary coping strategy, or the outcome of unresolved value conflicts and internal dilemmas (Valle, 2019). In counseling practice, practitioners frequently encounter students who cognitively recognize problematic situations yet are not psychologically prepared to respond or act upon that awareness (Arum & Ignacio, 2024). This condition positions self-awareness as a central variable in guidance and counseling interventions (Yuliasari, 2020).

From a guidance and counseling perspective, self-awareness does not operate in isolation but is closely interconnected with self-esteem, locus of control, and decision-making courage (Ramadhani et al., 2024). Students with underdeveloped self-awareness are more likely to

struggle with boundary-setting, recognizing personal violations, and accessing professional support when needed (Szczygiel, 2021). Consequently, the level of self-awareness among first-year students can be understood as an early indicator of guidance and counseling service needs, particularly in preventive and developmental domains (Enache & Matei, 2017). Moreover, the guidance and counseling framework emphasizes the importance of primary prevention through the strengthening of psychological competencies before problems escalate into more severe conditions (Garaigordobil, 2023). In the context of sexual violence, enhancing first-year students' self-awareness constitutes a strategically significant preventive intervention (Garaigordobil, 2023). When students can recognize indicators of sexual violence, understand their rights and personal boundaries, and become aware of available response options, the risk of long-term psychological consequences can be substantially reduced (Davies & Berger, 2019).

Despite this theoretical mandate, empirical realities indicate that guidance and counseling services in higher education institutions often remain focused on academic concerns or individual cases that have already surfaced (Daulay et al., 2025). Issues of sexual violence and students' silence are frequently not positioned as integral components of developmentally grounded guidance and counseling programs (Kumari & Syarif, 2023). This limitation is supported by empirical findings showing that, despite the occurrence of sexual violence on campus, students' access to university counseling services remains highly restricted (Irawan et al., 2024). Victims commonly report a lack of information about counseling services, fear of stigma, and concerns about negative academic and social judgments if their experiences are disclosed. These findings highlight a gap in the existing literature, which has predominantly emphasized legal and psychological dimensions while overlooking students' lived experiences in accessing counseling services.

Similarly, while research by (Fidiawati et al., 2025) demonstrates that guidance and counseling interventions such as group guidance can enhance students' capacities for sexual violence prevention, the study also suggests that many campus counseling services continue to rely on standardized module-based designs rather than empirically grounded responses to students' actual experiences, including silence and service-access barriers. Together, these findings reveal a persistent disconnect between the theoretical mandate of guidance and counseling and its practical implementation in higher education, leaving first-year students as a vulnerable group insufficiently supported within existing counseling frameworks.

Accordingly, this study is grounded in the premise that students' self-awareness does not emerge instantaneously but is shaped through processes of social learning, personal experience, and sustained interaction with the university environment. Within this framework, guidance and counseling functions as a developmental facilitator of self-awareness through structured interventions, including classroom-based guidance, group counseling, and individual counseling. In the absence of empirical evidence regarding first-year students' levels of self-awareness, guidance and counseling services risk being designed in normative, prescriptive ways that are insufficiently responsive to the psychological realities of students. The phenomenon of conscious silence is positioned in this study as a critical signal for counselors to identify students' latent and unarticulated needs. Silence, in this context, does not indicate the absence of problems; rather, it may reflect intrapsychic conflict, fear of social consequences, and diminished trust in available support systems. Within the Guidance and Counseling paradigm, such signals constitute essential entry points for needs assessment and for the design of more targeted and contextually grounded interventions (Bertram et al., 2016).

Thus, this study seeks not only to describe the level of self-awareness among first-year students but also to provide a conceptual and empirical foundation for the development of guidance and counseling services that are more responsive to the realities of sexual violence in university settings. The findings are expected to assist counselors in understanding patterns of awareness and silence among students, enabling the provision of services that are not merely informational but transformative in nature. From a disciplinary standpoint, this study reinforces the position of guidance and counseling as a field concerned not only with individual problem resolution, but also with the cultivation of a psychologically safe and healthy campus climate. By foregrounding self-awareness as a central construct, the study affirms that the prevention of sexual violence constitutes an integral component of guidance and counseling's mandate in supporting students' holistic development.

Finally, this study argues that efforts to disrupt cultures of silence surrounding sexual violence on campus cannot rely solely on regulations and punitive measures, but must be accompanied by the systematic strengthening of students' self-awareness through guidance and counseling approaches. By examining how first-year students perceive, evaluate, and respond to sexual violence, counselors are better positioned to design interventions that are contextually sensitive, humanistic, and developmentally oriented.

METHODS

Approach

This study adopted a quantitative, descriptive–analytic design to examine first-year students' self-awareness of sexual violence and tendencies toward conscious silence in the university context (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). While quantitative in nature, the analysis critically interpreted numerical findings within the social and cultural dynamics of campus life. First-year students at Universitas PGRI Kanjuruhan Malang were purposively selected, as they are in a formative adaptation phase in which awareness of sexual violence is still developing. Self-awareness was operationalized across cognitive, affective, and reflective dimensions, including the capacity to act or remain silent (Akhnaf et al., 2022).

Respondent

This research was conducted in the 2025–2026 academic year at PGRI Kanjuruhan University, Malang, which was chosen due to its diverse and multicultural student population. The research instrument respondents numbered 352 students, consisting of various regions. Further details can be seen in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Participants

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n=352)	Percentage (%)
Regional Origin	Java	138	39,2%
	Sumatera	88	25%
	Sulawesi	52	14,8%
	Kalimantan	39	11,1%
	Bali & NTT	19	5,4%
	Maluku & Papua	16	4,5%
Gender	Male / Female	158 / 192	44,9% / 55,1%
Academic Year	2025/2026	352	100%

Instrument

The research instrument covered awareness, perceptions and experiences, contributing factors, prevention and responsibility, and campus policies related to sexual violence. An online questionnaire distributed during the first-year student orientation program employed a Guttman scale with dichotomous responses (“Yes/No”) Instrument validity and reliability were tested before data collection.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed to first-year students during the academic orientation program. This timing was selected to capture an initial profile of students’ awareness, perceptions, and experiences related to sexual violence at the early stage of their university life. The questionnaire link was disseminated through official institutional communication channels, with the support of orientation facilitators to ensure controlled and ethical participation. Prior to completing the questionnaire, participants were provided with detailed information regarding the study objectives, data confidentiality, and voluntary participation, including the right to withdraw at any time without consequences. All responses were collected anonymously to minimize social desirability bias and to encourage honest reporting.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis used descriptive quantitative techniques to map patterns of awareness and response tendencies among students (Jailani & Saksitha, 2024). Percentage distributions were analyzed to identify general trends and awareness gaps, providing an empirical basis for targeted educational and preventive interventions. The research process included preparation, data collection, analysis, and interpretation, culminating in conclusions and practical recommendations for strengthening sexual violence prevention in higher education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Table 2 presents a conceptual model that illustrates the interrelationships among factors influencing students’ awareness, perceptions, and responses to sexual violence in higher education settings. The model positions contextual and structural factors such as social norms, cultural values, and institutional policies as foundational elements shaping students’ levels of knowledge and understanding of sexual violence. These levels of awareness subsequently influence how students interpret experiences, assess the severity of incidents, and determine their attitudes and actions when confronted with situations of sexual violence. Through this framework, it becomes evident that students’ responses do not occur in isolation but emerge from a complex interaction of individual, social, and institutional factors. Therefore, efforts to prevent and address sexual violence must be implemented through comprehensive and integrated approaches.

Table 2. Conceptual Model of the Relationship between Student Awareness, Perception, and Response to Sexual Violence

Main Dimension	Components / Indicators	Conceptual Description	Implications for Student Responses
Contextual and Social Factors	Social norms, culture, gender relations, media, and campus policies	Environmental factors shaping how students understand and interpret sexual violence	Form the foundation of initial attitudes and perceptions toward sexual violence
Awareness and Knowledge	Understanding of forms of sexual violence, victims' rights, and behavioral boundaries	Level of students' knowledge regarding what constitutes sexual violence	Influences the ability to recognize and assess acts as sexual violence
Perceptions and Attitudes	Perceived severity, normalization of behavior, attitudes toward victims	Cognitive and affective interpretation of sexual violence cases	Determines the tendency to reject, justify, or tolerate sexual violence
Experience and Exposure	Having witnessed, heard about, or experienced sexual violence	Direct or indirect exposure to incidents of sexual violence	Affects sensitivity, vigilance, and readiness to respond
Responses and Actions	Reporting, seeking help, remaining silent, or avoidance	Actual actions taken when encountering or witnessing cases	Reflects the level of empowerment and willingness to act
Institutional Policies and Climate	Reporting mechanisms, institutional support, policy enforcement	Structural environment that facilitates or hinders case management	Determines the effectiveness of prevention and protection efforts

Building on the conceptual framework outlined in Table 2, Table 3 presents empirical evidence illustrating how these interconnected dimensions are manifested in students' actual levels of awareness, perception, and behavioral response. The table highlights the extent to which students possess knowledge about sexual violence, have been exposed to related incidents, understand reporting procedures, trust institutional mechanisms, and demonstrate willingness to take action. By juxtaposing these indicators, Table 3 reveals a critical gap between awareness and action, emphasizing the paradox in which relatively high levels of exposure and procedural knowledge do not consistently translate into strong institutional trust or proactive reporting behavior. This pattern underscores the complex interaction between cognitive awareness and behavioral response, as conceptualized in the preceding model.

Table 3. The Paradox of Awareness: Knowledge vs. Action

Indicator of Self-Awareness	Measurement (Yes/No)	Positive Response (%)	Interpretation
Knowledge	Comprehensive understanding of SV types	40.20%	Low to Moderate
Exposure	Have witnessed or heard of SV incidents	82.40%	Very High
Procedural Literacy	Awareness of reporting procedures	72.70%	High
Institutional Trust	Perception of university's seriousness	48.30%	Moderate
Agency	Willingness to report to authorities	58.90%	Paradoxical

Based on the conceptual framework outlined above, Table 3 presents empirical findings illustrating the relationship between students' levels of awareness, experiences, and responses to sexual violence. These data indicate a significant gap between students' knowledge and actual actions. Although most respondents had high exposure to sexual violence issues (82.40%) and a relatively good level of procedural literacy regarding reporting mechanisms (72.70%), this was not fully accompanied by a high level of trust in institutions (48.30%) or the courage to report cases formally (58.90%). This condition reflects a phenomenon known as "conscious silence," a situation where individuals possess adequate understanding and awareness but choose not to act due to doubts about the system, concerns about social repercussions, or perceived personal risk. Thus, the findings in Table 3 confirm that increasing knowledge alone is insufficient without being accompanied by strengthened institutional trust and guaranteed real protection for victims and reporters. The researchers further explain these findings in more detail. The following explanation:

Awareness and Understanding of Sexual Violence

Participation in Seminars or Training

Based on the instrument results, only 35.8% of students reported having participated in seminars or training related to the prevention and handling of sexual violence, while 64.2% indicated that they had never attended such activities. These findings suggest that a substantial proportion of students have limited exposure to formal education on sexual violence prevention, reflecting a low level of engagement with institutional awareness initiatives. Figure 1 presents the distribution of first-year students' responses:

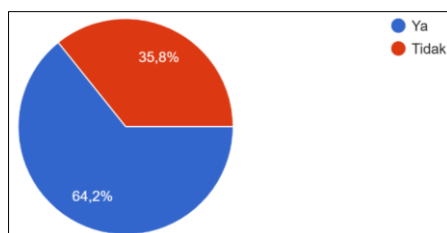


Figure 1. Participation in Seminars or Training on the Prevention and Handling of Sexual Violence

Sexually Violent Behavior

The instrument results indicate that 40.2% of students demonstrate an understanding of various forms of sexual violence, including physical harassment, verbal harassment, and technology-facilitated sexual violence. While this suggests a basic level of awareness among a portion of students, the findings also reveal significant informational gaps. Insufficient comprehensive understanding may contribute to the normalization of behaviors that constitute sexual violence, underscoring the need for targeted educational interventions.

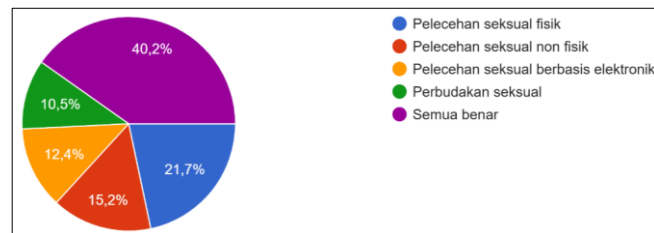


Figure 2. Sexually Violent Behavior

Topics in the Sexual Violence Prevention Seminar

The instrument identified key topics that should be incorporated into sexual violence prevention training. The highest priority was understanding the forms of sexual violence (24.8%), highlighting students' recognition of foundational knowledge as essential for prevention. This was followed by procedures for responding to known or experienced sexual violence (21.1%), indicating a need for clear guidance on appropriate actions. Other important topics included legal consequences for perpetrators (16.9%) and fostering a culture of respect and mutual regard (15.2%). Although rated lower, bystander intervention strategies (10.2%) and victims' rights (11.2%) remain essential components of a comprehensive training framework.

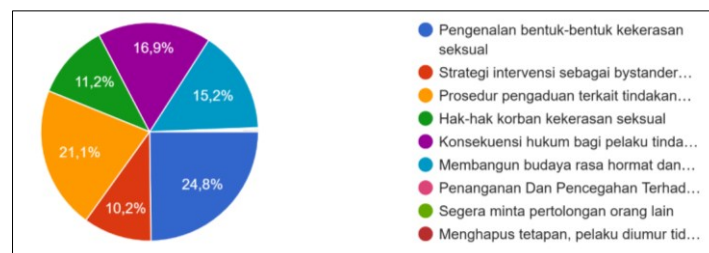


Figure 3. Topics in the Sexual Violence Prevention Seminar

Perceptions and Experiences of Sexual Violence on Campus

Perceived Severity of Sexual Violence as a Campus Issue

The instrument results reveal considerable variation in students' perceptions of the seriousness of sexual violence on campus. While 48.3% of respondents perceived it as a very serious issue and 18.7% as moderately serious, a substantial proportion (33.0%) viewed sexual violence as either not serious (20.5%) or not a problem at all (12.5%). This divergence indicates a normalization tendency among a significant minority of students and underscores the need for enhanced awareness of the consequences and impacts of sexual violence within the university context.

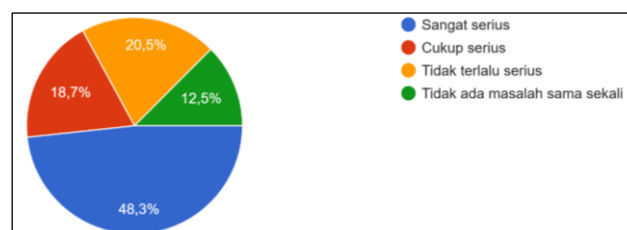


Figure 4. Level of Seriousness of Sexual Violence Problems on Campus

Exposure to Sexual Violence Incidents and Responses

The findings show that 82.4% of students had witnessed or heard about sexual violence incidents, indicating a high level of exposure. Responses varied from active interventions (reporting, confronting perpetrators, supporting victims) to passive reactions driven by fear, uncertainty, or indirect exposure via social media. This variation underscores the need for clearer, structured guidance on appropriate responses to sexual violence.

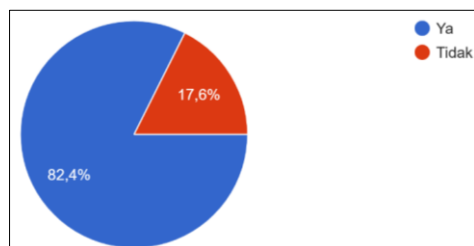


Figure 5. Experience of Witnessing/Hearing Incidents of Sexual Violence and Responses to Them

Level of Sense of Security in the Campus Environment

The results indicate that perceptions of campus safety were predominantly neutral (43.8%), with 33.0% of students reporting feeling moderately safe and 17.6% feeling very safe. Nevertheless, a small but notable proportion expressed feelings of insecurity, with 4.0% feeling somewhat unsafe and 1.7% feeling very unsafe. These findings suggest that despite institutional safety efforts, certain students continue to experience discomfort, pointing to the need for more inclusive and responsive campus safety measures.

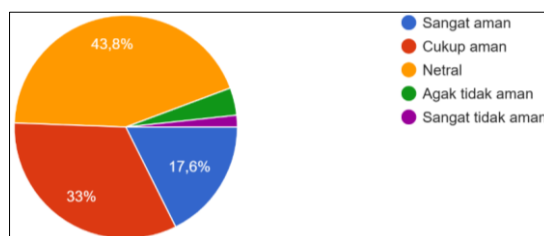


Figure 6. Level of Sense of Safety in the Campus Environment

Factors Contributing

Factors Contributing to Sexual Violence

The findings indicate that the primary contributing factor to sexual violence on campus is inadequate sexual education and limited rights awareness (29.2%), reflecting insufficient understanding of personal boundaries and self-protection. Other significant factors include weak consequences for perpetrators (20.0%) and inadequate campus supervision (16.8%). Cultural and social factors such as party culture and alcohol consumption (12.9%), norms that tolerate aggressive behavior (12.9%), and gender inequality (8.3%) also contribute, underscoring that sexual violence risk is shaped by both structural and sociocultural dynamics.

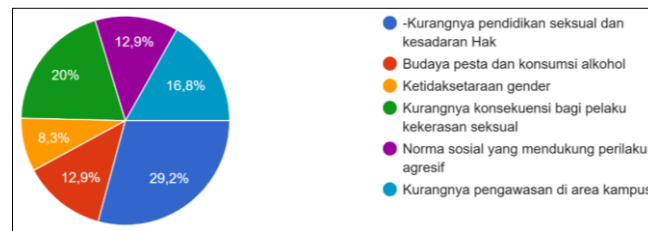


Figure 7. Factors Contributing to Sexual Violence

The Influence of Culture and Social Norms

The results show that the majority of respondents (75.6%) perceived culture and social norms as highly influential in shaping sexual violence on campus, with an additional 21.6% viewing them as moderately influential. This underscores the central role of cultural factors in influencing attitudes and behaviors related to sexual violence, while only a negligible proportion perceived minimal or no influence.

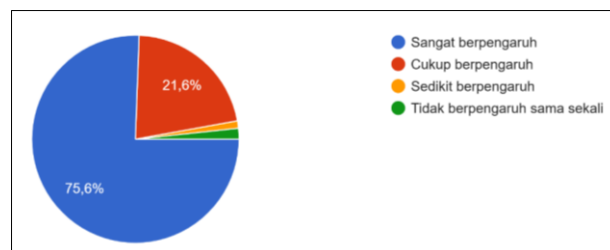


Figure 8. Influence of Culture and Social Norms

Gender-Based Differences in Treatment or Expectations

The findings indicate that 81.8% of respondents perceived gender-based differences in treatment or expectations as present and contributory to sexual violence, while only 18.2% reported no perceived association. This result highlights the prominent role of gendered norms and expectations in shaping vulnerability to sexual violence within the university context.

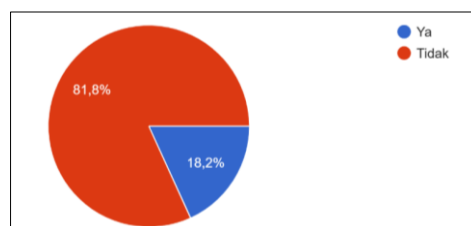


Figure 9. Gender-Based Differences in Treatment or Expectations that Can Trigger Sexual Violence

The Role of Social Media and Technology in Sexual Violence Issues

The results indicate that social media and digital technologies are perceived as highly influential in sexual violence issues, with 64.2% of respondents rating their role as very significant and 31.8% as moderately significant. Only a negligible proportion viewed these

platforms as having little or no influence, underscoring the critical role of technology in shaping contemporary sexual violence dynamics.

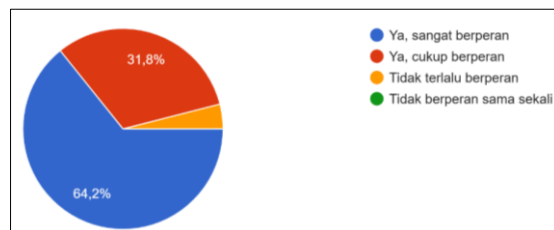


Figure 10. The Role of Social Media and Technology in the Problem of Sexual Violence

Prevention and Responsibility in Addressing Sexual Violence

Parties Considered Responsible for Preventing and Addressing Sexual Violence

The findings indicate that half of the respondents (50.0%) viewed the prevention and response to sexual violence as a shared responsibility involving students, faculty, administrative staff, and campus security, reflecting awareness of the need for collective action. Campus security was identified as the primary actor by 19.1% of respondents, while 15.0% emphasized students' own responsibility, highlighting the role of peer support and student engagement. Faculty (12.2%) and administrative staff were perceived as having more limited roles, suggesting the need to strengthen their involvement through comprehensive training and integrated prevention strategies across the university ecosystem.

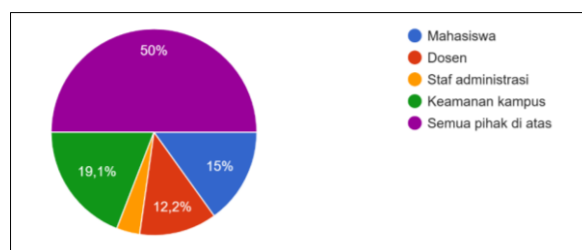


Figure 11. Prevention and Responsibility in Handling Sexual Violence

Actions to Take If You Become a Witness or Victim of Sexual Violence

The results show that most respondents (58.9%) would report incidents of sexual violence to campus authorities, indicating awareness of formal reporting mechanisms. Additionally, 24.2% would seek counseling support, while 13.0% would disclose the incident to friends or family, highlighting the continued importance of psychological and social support in responding to sexual violence.

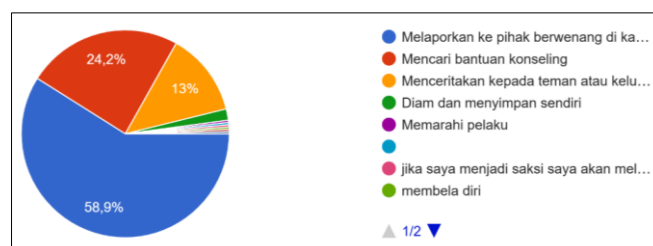


Figure 12. Actions to Take If You Become a Witness or Victim of Sexual Violence

Campus Services and Policies Regarding Sexual Violence

Student Understanding of Sexual Violence Reporting Procedures

Based on the results of the instrument regarding student understanding of sexual violence reporting procedures on campus, the majority of respondents, 72.7%, stated that they understood the applicable reporting procedures. Meanwhile, 27.3% of respondents admitted to not knowing these procedures.

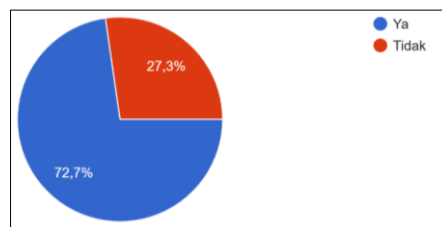


Figure 13. Students' Understanding of Sexual Violence Reporting Procedures

Effectiveness of Campus Policies and Programs

The findings indicate that campus policies and programs addressing sexual violence are generally perceived as effective, with 55.7% of respondents rating them as highly effective and 41.5% as moderately effective. This suggests that most students view existing institutional measures as functioning well in preventing and responding to sexual violence.

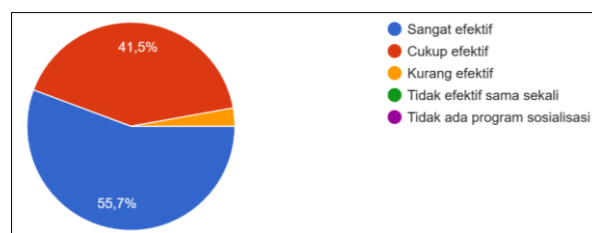


Figure 14. Effectiveness of Campus Policies and Programs in Handling and Preventing Sexual Violence

Discussion

The findings indicate that first-year students' self-awareness of sexual violence occupies an ambiguous position: it is neither absent nor sufficiently developed to function as reflective awareness that motivates action. This condition is reflected in the low level of student participation in Sexual Violence Prevention and Response (SVPR) seminars or training programs, with only 35.8% of students reporting prior participation, while 64.2% had never engaged in such activities. These data suggest that a substantial proportion of students enter university without adequate developmental support to cultivate self-awareness regarding sexual violence. From a Guidance and Counseling perspective, this condition reflects weak preventive and developmental services during a critical transitional phase for first-year students.

In this context, self-awareness cannot be reduced to mere familiarity with the terminology of sexual violence, but must be understood as students' capacity to recognize personal boundaries, comprehend power relations, and anticipate the psychological and social

consequences of silence (Soudien, 2015). Instrument results show that only 40.2% of students demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of various forms of sexual violence, including physical, verbal, and technology-facilitated abuse. This indicates that most students remain at a partial cognitive awareness level. When understanding is fragmented, self-awareness becomes fragile and susceptible to the normalization of problematic behaviors, such as sexualized humor, verbal harassment, or the non-consensual circulation of digital content (Sihaloho, 2019).

This fragility is further evident in students' perceptions of the seriousness of sexual violence. While 48.3% of respondents perceived sexual violence as a very serious issue and 18.7% as fairly serious, 33% regarded it as not particularly serious or not a problem at all. This proportion points to a moral awareness gap, indicating that some students have not fully internalized sexual violence as a tangible threat to psychological well-being. Within a Guidance and Counseling framework, such findings suggest that students' self-awareness remains at an early developmental stage and has not yet been integrated with empathy, social responsibility, and moral courage (Qowimah et al., 2021).

The phenomenon of conscious silence becomes particularly salient when considering that 82.4% of students reported having witnessed or heard about incidents of sexual violence. This finding demonstrates that sexual violence is not an abstract or distant phenomenon, but part of students' lived campus experiences. However, responses varied widely from reporting incidents, confronting perpetrators, or assisting victims, to doing nothing due to fear, confusion, or perceived lack of capacity to act. It is within this gap that conscious silence gains analytical significance: students recognize sexual violence as problematic, yet their awareness is insufficiently robust to translate into action. Silence, therefore, does not stem from ignorance, but from psychological disempowerment, social fear, and the absence of practiced response skills.

The failure of self-awareness to develop into social self-efficacy is also reflected in perceptions of campus safety. Although 50.6% of students reported feeling fairly to very safe and 43.8% adopted a neutral stance, 5.7% indicated feeling unsafe or very unsafe. While numerically small, from a counseling perspective, even a minority experiencing insecurity signals a developmental environment failure. Feelings of unsafety may reinforce silence, as students who perceive the campus as unsafe are more likely to avoid reporting and adopt passive survival strategies (Mandell, 2024).

Contributing factors identified by respondents further illuminate the contextual constraints shaping self-awareness. Lack of sexual education and awareness of rights emerged as the most prominent factor (29.2%), followed by weak consequences for perpetrators (20%) and insufficient supervision in campus areas (16.8%). These findings underscore that self-awareness does not develop in isolation, but is embedded within institutional systems and campus culture. When education is limited, and sanctions are perceived as ineffective, silence becomes a socially "safe" option.

Cultural norms and social expectations further reinforce this dynamic, with 75.6% of respondents acknowledging that cultural norms strongly influence sexual violence, and 81.8% identifying gender-based expectations and differential treatment as contributory factors. Norms that normalize dominance, aggressive masculinity, and female passivity may undermine students' critical self-awareness. From a Guidance and Counseling standpoint, these findings reinforce the need for interventions that target not only individuals but also

collective awareness and campus culture (Halim & Dalimoenthe, 2025).

The role of social media and digital technology adds another layer of complexity. A majority of respondents perceived social media as playing a significant (64.2%) or moderate (31.8%) role in sexual violence. However, awareness of digital risks was not accompanied by sufficient protective skills or reporting confidence. Consequently, technology-facilitated sexual violence becomes a new domain of conscious silence, wherein students recognize violations but refrain from acting due to fear of stigma, retaliation, or viral exposure (Powell & Henry, 2017).

In terms of prevention and responsibility, half of the respondents (50%) viewed sexual violence prevention as a shared responsibility. While this perspective is normatively positive, it also risks responsibility diffusion. Students' self-awareness of their own role as prevention agents remains limited, as evidenced by continued silence among some respondents despite 58.9% indicating willingness to report and 24.2% expressing intent to seek counseling support.

Overall, the findings suggest that first-year students' self-awareness of sexual violence can be characterized as aware but not empowered. The phenomenon of conscious silence should not be interpreted as indifference, but as an indicator of unmet developmental and counseling needs. Without systematic Guidance and Counseling interventions through classroom guidance, group counseling, individual counseling, and advocacy students' self-awareness risks stagnating as passive awareness that inadvertently sustains cultures of silence on campus.

These findings align with (Fitzgerald & Cortina, 2018), who demonstrated that adequate knowledge of sexual violence does not necessarily translate into the courage or capacity to act in real-life situations. Their work highlights a persistent gap between cognition and action, where awareness functions as risk recognition rather than as a trigger for protective behavior. For first-year students, this gap is exacerbated by their transitional position within campus hierarchies, rendering their awareness vulnerable to suppression by power asymmetries.

The results also reinforce (Moynihan et al., 2014), who conceptualized silence in sexual violence contexts as strategic silence rather than apathy. Students often remain silent not due to lack of understanding, but because of calculated considerations of social risk, stigma, and potential revictimization. This interpretation resonates with the concept of conscious silence advanced in the present study, wherein first-year students cognitively recognize injustice but lack the psychosocial capital and support systems required for safe and effective action.

However, in contrast to (Hopper et al., 2022), who found that increased sexual violence literacy through institutional campaigns enhanced reporting willingness, the present study indicates that limited exposure to SVPR activities has not facilitated a meaningful transformation from awareness to empowerment. This discrepancy suggests that formal education alone is insufficient without sustained, reflective, and developmentally attuned guidance and counseling interventions. Without deeper internalization processes, literacy risks functioning merely as normative knowledge that fails to alter behavior.

Furthermore, the findings extend (Diemer et al., 2016) work on critical consciousness, which emphasizes that genuine awareness must be accompanied by praxis. First-year students in this study demonstrate initial awareness but have not yet reached a level of transformative critical

consciousness. The absence of safe dialogical spaces, preventive counseling, and experience-based advocacy constrains awareness to a passive reflective stage. Consequently, cultures of silence on campus emerge not only from patriarchal norms but also from the absence of developmental interventions that facilitate the transition from being aware to being empowered.

Taken together, these findings indicate that conscious silence among first-year students constitutes a consistent empirical pattern that is frequently misinterpreted as indifference. This study underscores that self-awareness, in the absence of systematic guidance and counseling interventions, risks becoming passive awareness that perpetuates silent cultures. Accordingly, guidance and counseling services in higher education must shift from predominantly informational approaches toward developmental and empowerment-oriented frameworks. Such a shift is essential to ensure that students' self-awareness evolves beyond knowing, toward courage, agency, and active participation in the prevention of sexual violence within university environments.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that first-year students' self-awareness of sexual violence in the university context is paradoxical. Although students display basic exposure and initial knowledge, this awareness has not translated into proactive attitudes or responsible behaviors. The pattern of conscious silence reflects students' recognition of sexual violence risks alongside passivity driven by limited understanding, procedural uncertainty, and psychological and social barriers. Low participation in prevention and response training contributes to fragmented knowledge, particularly regarding non-physical and technology-facilitated forms of sexual violence, fostering normalization and weakening empathic responses. While some students demonstrate foundational awareness, significant gaps in sexual violence literacy persist. Perceptions of the seriousness of sexual violence vary widely, with a notable proportion failing to view it as urgent, despite high exposure to reported or witnessed incidents indicating a structural campus issue. Diverse student responses further reveal the absence of an internalized framework for ethical and effective action. Contributing factors extend beyond individuals to include cultural norms, gender inequality, weak institutional sanctions, and the amplifying role of digital media, underscoring the multidimensional nature of sexual violence. From a guidance and counseling perspective, services remain largely reactive and administrative, limiting their preventive and developmental potential. The findings highlight the need to reposition counseling as a central psychosocial service that bridges awareness, attitudes, and action, fostering a campus culture of critical awareness, moral courage, and collective responsibility.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Both authors made substantial contributions to this study. The first author was responsible for the conception of the research idea, the development of the research design and conceptual framework, data collection and analysis, and the preparation of the initial manuscript draft. The second author contributed to strengthening the theoretical foundation, refining the critical analysis, reviewing the methodological rigor, and conducting substantial revisions to enhance the scholarly quality and coherence of the manuscript. Both authors jointly reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and take full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and academic credibility of the work.

COMPETING OF INTEREST

The authors declare no competing of interest.

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