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The impact of experiencing sexual violence against women in Sidoarjo city

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Abstract

Cases of sexual violence are increasingly widespread and alarming in the era of globalization. Sexual violence is common among women and has reached epidemic levels, affecting more than a third of women worldwide. The problems and consequences of sexual violence can lead to various conditions that interfere with women's mental and physical health. The purpose of this study is to identify the impact experienced by women after experiencing sexual violence. The research method used was a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach. The research was conducted for three months (February-April 2023) in Sidoarjo City, East Java. Data collection techniques used in-depth interviews obtained from 8 informants, including female victims of sexual violence and the Regional Technical Implementation Unit for the Protection of Women and Children (UPTD PPA) of Sidoarjo City. The data analysis technique used thematic analysis consisting of identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) found in the data and presenting them in detail and thoroughly. The results showed that the consequences of sexual violence caused women to experience unsafe abortion, unwanted pregnancy, bipolar, anxiety and fear disorders, sleep disorders, symptoms of psychosis, self-harm, and negative behavioral changes such as suicide attempts, smoking and drinking behavior, and sexual intercourse habits. Meanwhile, positive changes experienced include getting closer to God, trying to be productive, and evaluating and improving themselves.

Keywords: Sexual Violence; Physical Impact; Psychological Impact; Behavioural Change Impact

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of sexual violence is currently one of the most alarming problems. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), sexual violence against women has reached epidemic levels affecting more than a third of women globally. This is because women are always seen as second-class citizens, in which the habitus of women who place them as second-class beings is often the reason for acts of sexual violence against women (1). Sexual violence is an act of sexual contact that is not consensual, non-consensual acts of a sexual nature that do not involve contact or activities to obtain sexual pleasure by looking at body parts of the opposite sex, acts of sexual trafficking committed against someone who cannot consent or refuse, or even exploitation carried out online (2). The scope of sexual violence based on the Academic Paper of the Bill on the Elimination of Sexual Violence in 2017 is a person's experience when experiencing sexual violence not only in the form of rape or sexual abuse but other types such as sexual harassment, sexual intimidation, sexual control, forced marriage, sexual exploitation, sexual torture, and sexual slavery.

The number of cases of sexual violence in Indonesia has increased every year, with many female victims. It can be seen based on the annual records of the National Commission on Violence Against Women in 2022, the type of sexual violence cases is the type of violence against women in Indonesia that has the highest number with 9,333 victims. Furthermore, based on data from the Office of Women's Empowerment, Child Protection and Population (DP3AK) of East Java Province, cases of violence against women as of September 12, 2022, have increased from 2021 to 2022. The increase also occurred in 2019 with 997 victims, whereas in the previous year (2018), there were 883 victims, while in 2021 to

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2022, the number of victims was 845 to 1,193 victims of violence against women. The cases of sexual violence occurred in 38 districts and cities in East Java, and Sidoarjo Regency is in the 5th highest category out of 38 districts in East Java Province with 27 cases of sexual violence against women.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1948, the definition of health is "Health is a complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (WHO, 1948). This definition means that health is a condition of physical, mental, and social well-being, not just the absence of disease or physical and psychological infirmity. Many problems and consequences can lead to various conditions of disturbance in the mental and physical health of someone who has experienced violent events, especially sexual violence. Several studies have found that in the first six months after a sexual assault, victims exhibit high levels of depression, anxiety, shock, and other signs of emotional distress.

Sexual violence causes various impacts on physical, social, and psychological disorders and behavioral changes. The physical effects include unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS, and disruption or damage to reproductive organs. This is related to Law No. 36 of 2009 concerning Health, Government Regulation No. 61 of 2014 concerning Reproductive Health. Furthermore, the social impact based on the case study in Tuban, East Java, found that research participants who were victims of sexual violence often received stigma and rejection either verbally or non-verbally by the community in the surrounding environment and cornered the existence of victims by showing discriminatory attitudes. This can make it difficult for victims to reintegrate into society (3). In addition, the psychological impact of sexual violence has a profound traumatizing effect on victims. Victims can experience depression due to the traumatic experiences they have experienced, which can cause anxiety, PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), social phobia, drug use, sexual difficulties, and suicidal behavior. Based on the above problems is the background for researchers to see the impact on women after experiencing sexual violence.

2. Material and methods

2.1. Research Type and Design

Jenis metode penelitian yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah kualitatif dengan pendekatan fenomenologi. Lokasi penelitian berada di Kota Sidoarjo, Provinsi Jawa Timur, Indonesia. Lokasi ini dipilih berdasarkan Kota Sidoarjo. The type of research method used in this research is qualitative with a phenomenological approach. The research location is in Sidoarjo City, East Java Province, Indonesia. This location was chosen because Sidoarjo City is one of the regions with a high incidence of sexual violence.

2.2. Method of Subject Determination and Retrieval

In this study, the determination of subjects used a purposive sampling technique using the inclusion criteria for women who had experienced sexual violence aged 18-40 years.

2.3. Methods of Data Collection

The data collection technique used was to collect primary data and secondary data. The data were obtained from in-depth interviews with two UPTD PPA Sidoarjo parties and six key informants, namely female victims who experienced sexual violence. Secondary data was obtained from data on the number of cases of sexual violence.

2.4. Data Analysis

The data analysis used in this research is thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) contained in data and presenting them in a detailed and complete manner.

2.5. Triangulation Data Validity Technique

The data validity stage that researchers can do is to establish the credibility and validity of the data. The triangulation process is carried out to increase the credibility and validity of the data. The type of triangulation to be used in this research is source triangulation, namely matching the statements of the primary research informants and key primary informants that have already been obtained during in-depth interviews.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Impact on Physical Condition After Experiencing Sexual Violence

Table 1 Codes, Categories, and Themes of Impact on Physical Condition

Themes	Categories	Codes
Impact on Physical Condition	Reproduction	Unsafe abortion Unintended pregnancy occurs
	Self Harm	Banging oneself against a wall Cutting hands with razor blades Suicide attempt
	Psychosis	The suggestion of taking inappropriate drugs to relieve pain

Acts of sexual violence that occur to women can have a physical impact. According to the research results, the physical effects obtained from in-depth interviews with key informants include reproductive effects, self-harm or the behavior of individuals who intentionally harm themselves, and psychosis.

3.1.1. The Reproduction Impact

The reproductive impact of sexual violence is, according to the research results, unwanted pregnancies that can lead to unsafe abortion practices. Women who experience pregnancy due to sexual violence generally cannot accept their pregnancies and take various wrong actions to abort the womb. KS4 consumed supplement drinks that should not be recommended for consumption by pregnant women.

"Every day I don't drink himation because I want this child to be born, everything I can do for the fetus so that it doesn't develop, but fate has told this child to be born, he is strong, and the impact when he was born" (KS4, 24 years old)

"...but I don't recognize the child, I only recognize my brother's dian. She was born with Down syndrome. I regret it now because, at that time, I was messed up. I tried to make this baby unable to develop" (KS4, 24 years old)

In addition, victims may also be coerced into unsafe abortions that can have an impact on their physical condition. The Physical impact of abortion includes the risk of complications, bleeding, infection, and damage to the uterus and vagina. KS3 experienced changes in her physical condition after having an abortion, such as being tired and getting sick more easily. This is due to the lack of post-abortion care, such as rest and health checks. Unsafe abortion can also affect the fetus born from a botched abortion. Babies from botched abortions can suffer from physical abnormalities and genetic disorders.

" My body is strange. I often get sick. I don't know if maybe I didn't rest after the abortion because no one at home knew I was pregnant. I tried to be ordinary, and nothing happened " (KS3, 22 years old)

3.1.2. Self Harm

Victims who experience sexual violence can engage in negative coping by self-harming to distract themselves from the sad feelings experienced after the violence. Self-harm is a form of action or encouragement to perform actions that hurt or injure themselves in various ways to divert feelings of pain experienced psychologically to physical pain. The Physical impact of this self-harming behavior is from cutting hands with sharp objects to suicide attempts (4). P In KS1, this self-harming behavior aims to visualize the pain he is experiencing psychologically into a form of physical injury that can be seen as a temporary distraction.

"Yes, the pain, you know, as a wound hurts and can be seen, but the heart and mind feel pain but don't see the shape, so it feels uncomfortable, so you know, if I'm like this, I've cut my hands, I feel satisfied" (KS1, 22 years old)

In addition, in KS4, self-harm behavior was carried out when bad memories of sexual violence suddenly appeared. Thus, self-harm behavior is carried out by the victim to be able to forget the incident of sexual violence and make the victim relieved.

"When I remember it, my body must be cold and dizzy a long time ago as well, as my hands must be shaking, and I can stop the panic attack by staring at my body on the wall, because like that, I can be relieved, hitting my head, hitting the bar while crying, I can calm down" (KS4, 24 years old)

This is a harmful impact that cannot solve the victim's traumatic problems and tends to cause new problems, namely dependence on feelings for a moment after doing self-harm. Thus, victims of sexual violence need to be accompanied so they can divert their feelings to more positive things, such as doing beneficial physical activities.

3.1.3. Psychosis

Symptoms of psychosis can be defined as a condition in which a person has difficulty distinguishing between the reality that is happening and the imagination that is in their mind. Victims of sexual violence who experience severe trauma will be able to feel the impact of psychosis in the form of disturbances in how the brain processes information. Thus, this condition can change the way they think and behave. One of them is the emergence of incorrect suggestions, as felt by KS1, where he experienced the idea of being calmer by taking painkillers in an amount that exceeded the usual dose.

" I overdid it (paracetamol) because the suggestion of paracetamol is a pain reliever, and I think that painkillers can ease my heartache, you know, it's different, it's like a suggestion like it can ease the pain. I don't just drink one. I drink a lot right away, sometimes up to five. I don't drink a lot right away, but one at a time, so I drink one, then I drink water, then one more, and that's it. Eventually, the effect on me, my stomach ulcers, sores" (KS1, 22 years old)

KS1, as an adult, took paracetamol painkillers in large quantities and swallowed them one by one, assisted by drinking water. This, in turn, hurt the victim's physical condition, such as gastric distress and other complications.

3.2. Impact on Psychological Condition After Experiencing Sexual Violence

Table 2 Codes, Categories, and Themes of Impact on Psychological Condition

Themes	Categories	Code
Impact on Psychological Condition	Bipolar	Feelings of excited euphoria or high synergy Rapid and drastic mood swings
	Fear and Anxiety Disorder	Experiencing fears and sad feelings about sexual matters Fear and anxiety when meeting other people
	Sleep Disorder	Irregular sleep patterns due to a lot of thoughts

Sexual violence that occurs to women can have an impact on psychological conditions. According to the results of the psychological research, the effects described by the primary informant are getting a bipolar diagnosis, experiencing fear and anxiety disorders, and having sleep disorders.

3.2.1. Bipolar

Based on the results of psychological research, one of the impacts felt by informants is getting a bipolar diagnosis. Bipolar is a feeling of excited euphoria or high synergy and mood swings that occur quickly and drastically. Sexual violence is a traumatic event that can be a risk factor for bipolar disorder. Patients with bipolar disorder experience mania phases, such as feeling happy and excited excessively, and depression phases, such as feeling sad and empty (5). This was found in KS1, who was diagnosed by a psychiatrist with bipolar disorder. When in the mania phase, KS1 could feel excessively excited and energized, which made him unable to stay home and must do activities that can channel his energy.

" I don't sleep. I go out every day. I don't want to know how I have to go out. I can't be in the room alone doing anything or just sitting. I can't. I have to do anything anyway when I'm at home. I sometimes cook late at night. I can't stop talking without pausing and singing" (KS1, 22 years old)

In this manic state, KS1 can have difficulty resting and doing extreme things, such as trying to jump from the second-floor bedroom window.

" Then I also once almost jumped from my room. It was my manic state. I was laughing like a crazy person. I was alone" (KS1, 22 years old)

Bipolar psychological disorder experienced by victims of sexual violence can be reduced with psychotherapy and the consumption of mood-stabilizing drugs, antipsychotics, and antidepressants.

3.2.2. Fear and Anxiety Disorders

A victim of sexual violence's perspective on sex will change drastically and can cause a negative response in terms of experiencing fear and anxiety when seeing things related to sexual behavior. Anxiety disorders are conditions of excessive worry accompanied by behavioral, emotional, and physiological responses (6). These responses can include feelings of panic for no reason, unreasonable fear, repetitive actions that cannot be controlled, or excessive worry. In KS6, feelings of intense fear and anxiety were felt while watching a drama movie in which there were sex-related scenes. Meanwhile, in KS1, excessive fears and panic were felt when leaving the house and meeting or interacting with many people.

".....in the position of Netflix and then the movie appears a scene like that, I don't understand why I suddenly cried, my vibes were immediately sad and scared, I felt like I was traumatized because of what happened at that time" (KS6, 20 years old)

" I often panic, I panic when I meet people, I mean like a little panic" (KS1, 22 years old)

3.2.3. Sleep Disorder

Another psychological impact can be disturbances in the sleeping patterns of victims of sexual violence. These disturbances can include difficulty falling asleep, lack of sleep, and erratic sleep. These sleep disturbances, if prolonged, can lead to changes in the biological sleep cycle, lower immunity and reduced productivity, irritability, and decreased concentration levels. In victims, sleep disturbances can occur for a week to a month, as experienced by KS1 when it is difficult to sleep but does not feel pain or any health problems. Then, according to the research results, it showed that KS4 had difficulty sleeping for four to five days when the trauma recurred.

" If you know now, I have never been sick. I didn't sleep for one month or two weeks. I'm still fine now though that was when I was really in a manic position like that" (KS1, 22 years old)

" If I have a mental relapse, I always cry, I can't sleep for 4-5 days" (KS4, 24 tahun)

3.3. Impact on Behavior Change After Experiencing Sexual Violence

Table 3 Codes, Categories, and Themes of Impact on Behavior Change

Themes	Categories	Code
Impact on Behavior Change	Negative Behavior	Smoking makes you calm Drinking (alcohol) makes you calm Habitual sexual intercourse
	Positive Behavior	Trying to be productive Get closer to God Evaluate and improve oneself

3.3.1. Negative Behavior

This smoking behavior is shown by KS1, who has become accustomed to smoking as a way to reduce stress and overcome the complex emotional impact of the trauma experienced. Therefore, the smoking behavior carried out by KS1 is only an escape. Most women who smoke report that the behavior is a way for women to relieve feelings of anger, upset, anxiety, or depression(7).

"But I don't smoke actively. I don't smoke every day. I'm just contextual behavior when I'm stressed out. I just smoke" (KS1, 22 years old)

In addition, the behavior of women who have experienced sexual violence shows a behavior change that leads to negative things such as drinking alcohol when experiencing a sense of unease. This behavior change is indicated by the behavior of KS4, who realized that since his depressed state, he was carried away by night associations which caused him to be inseparable from the habit of getting drunk. Victims of sexual violence, when they do not get the proper treatment, will choose shortcuts such as using drugs and alcohol to avoid memories of the events they experienced(8)

"I fell into it because of how yes, I became in my environment that often went to nightclubs, drinking, but that was my way to calm me down, I drank alcohol back" (KS4, 24 years old)

The impact of other behavioral changes on women who have experienced sexual violence can also result in these women falling further into a world that is not good, such as becoming accustomed to having sexual intercourse. KS4's behavior normalized having sexual intercourse with her close friends. There was one victim of sexual violence who felt humiliated because she had lost her virginity at a young age(9).

"...close to me there is only a need, especially a guy who is close to me, must be close because he needs it for his satisfaction, maybe because I am looked down upon so I am treated like that" (KS4, 24 years old)

3.3.2. Positive Behavior

Behavioral changes in women who have experienced sexual violence towards positive behavior are trying to be productive. Striving to be more effective is a powerful and meaningful step in the self-recovery journey. In the behavior change, this is shown by KS2 and KS6. KS2 intended that she had to focus on work and focus on her college education so as not to be trapped back in past events.

"Then my current hope is to focus on work plus now college" (KS2, 22 years old)

Victims in overcoming when reminded of the sexual violence incident, victims do various activities such as keeping themselves busy, having fun, and doing positive things(10). While the results of the research from KS6 in living his daily life have focused on the studies he is taking, his focus is currently not only on dating but more focused on his life to achieve the career that KS6 wants. Women who have experienced sexual violence need a process and time to be able to accept or return to living their lives healthily, such as being able to find meaning from every positive event experienced, remain productive, have activities to do every day, have goals and visions for their lives(11).

"... so for example, if I'm close to a guy, I keep my distance and don't meet him, and I become productive like there is no reason to meet him because I'm busy" (KS6, 20 years old)

In addition, the results also showed other positive behavioral changes, such as becoming closer to God. KS5 and KS6 experienced this behavior change in different ways. KS5 showed his changes by focusing on worship, such as being more diligent in performing obligatory and sunnah worship. KS5 did this because he felt that he had committed many sins, and in this way made KS5 feel calm in living his life in the present. A victim who has experienced sexual violence can do positive things, such as increase faith and get closer to God so that his soul will feel safe and peaceful(12).

"I cried every time I prayed until I asked for forgiveness until the night prayer, ... repentance prayers and others" (KS5, 22 years old)

Meanwhile, KS6 also did the same thing in making peace with his past, feeling the various downturns experienced and then recovering by doing activities that KS6 liked, and after feeling satisfied, KS6 just got closer to God because it became one of the most important, points to calm the heart, mind, and feelings in daily life. The victim feels grateful for getting out of the fear of the trauma experienced, thankful for making himself a person who tries to be productive and can learn a lot from it, and grateful because the incident made him closer to God(13).

"Continue to get closer to God, and that's the most comforting thing to improve me" (KS6, 20 years old)

The last positive behavior change is self-evaluation and self-improvement after experiencing sexual violence shown by KS2. The results of the research on KS2's behavioral changes show that he familiarized himself with the problems he experienced so that when he began to improve, KS2 conducted a self-evaluation of the good and bad of his actions in the past. Past experiences can provide changes for him to become an individual who can think maturely in dealing with problems and is problem-solving oriented (14).

"2-3 months, I started to forget and started to get better day by day, I started to get used to the state of myself that felt comfortable, but after a long time. I started to get emotionally down, then I started to think about why I was like that, what I changed" (KS2, 22 years old)

4. Conclusion

Women who have experienced acts of sexual violence have changes in their lives. The various impacts experienced by victims of sexual violence include physical impacts, psychological impacts, and the impact of behavioral changes. First, physical effects include reproductive disorders, self-harm, and psychosis. Second, the psychological impact on victims of sexual violence, which consists of bipolar symptoms, anxiety and fear, and sleep disturbances. Third, the effect on behavioral changes that lead to positive and negative behavioral changes.

Compliance with ethical standards

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

The data collection process with interviews with respondents has obtained permission from the relevant agencies and respondents concerned. This article has also never been published by another publisher. So this article has no potential conflict of interest.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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