



## Gender Inequality and Sexual Harassment in Family Environments: a Case Study of a Family in East Kalimantan

Fitri Rosanti

Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

email: [fidirosanti@gmail.com](mailto:fidirosanti@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** This study examines the relationship between gender inequality, patriarchal power relations, and sexual harassment within a family environment in East Kalimantan, Indonesia. Using a qualitative single case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews with five informants from one family, including two survivors and three family members. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis informed by Critical Feminist Theory. The findings reveal that patriarchal authority structures, gendered socialization, and family honor ideology create conditions that enable the occurrence and concealment of sexual harassment. Silencing mechanisms, emotional pressure, and economic dependency further limit victims' ability to disclose and seek help. Gender inequality is shown to shape vulnerability by restricting agency and normalizing male dominance within the household. The study concludes that addressing intrafamilial sexual harassment requires transforming patriarchal norms, strengthening survivor-centered support systems, and promoting gender equality within family structures and broader social environments.

**Keywords:** gender inequality, sexual harassment, patriarchy, family power relations.

**Abstrak:** Studi ini mengkaji hubungan antara ketimpangan gender, relasi kekuasaan patriarki, dan pelecehan seksual dalam lingkungan keluarga di Kalimantan Timur, Indonesia. Dengan menggunakan desain studi kasus tunggal kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan lima informan dari satu keluarga, termasuk dua penyintas dan tiga anggota keluarga. Data dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik yang diinformasikan oleh Teori Feminis Kritis. Temuan ini mengungkapkan bahwa struktur otoritas patriarki, sosialisasi gender, dan ideologi kehormatan keluarga menciptakan kondisi yang memungkinkan terjadinya dan menyembunyikan pelecehan seksual. Mekanisme pembungkaman, tekanan emosional, dan ketergantungan ekonomi semakin membatasi kemampuan korban untuk mengungkapkan dan mencari bantuan. Ketimpangan gender terbukti membentuk kerentanan dengan membatasi agensi dan menormalkan dominasi laki-laki dalam rumah tangga. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa mengatasi pelecehan seksual intrafamilial membutuhkan transformasi norma-norma patriarki, memperkuat sistem pendukung yang berpusat pada penyintas, dan mempromosikan kesetaraan gender dalam struktur keluarga dan lingkungan sosial yang lebih luas.

**Kata Kunci:** ketidaksetaraan gender, pelecehan seksual, patriarki, hubungan kekuasaan keluarga.

### **Introduction**

Gender inequality embedded within family norms is often regarded as a familiar social issue; however, it also plays a significant role in facilitating and concealing sexual harassment within domestic spaces (Saunders, 2022; IJRS, 2022). This phenomenon reveals a critical contradiction. While public awareness regarding the protection of women and children has increased considerably, patriarchal family structures continue to reinforce masculine dominance, control over women's bodies and voices, and the prioritization of family honor over individual safety. Consequently, cases of intrafamilial sexual harassment frequently remain undisclosed, underreported, or inadequately addressed (Mardiyah, 2025; Sukmawati, 2023). Evidence from Indonesia further indicates that a substantial proportion of sexual violence occurs within the home environment and is often disclosed first to family members rather than legal authorities, resulting in a tendency to manage such incidents internally rather than through formal reporting mechanisms (IJRS, 2022). Therefore, this study focuses on understanding how patriarchal gender relations within families function not merely as a background condition but also as a mechanism that produces and reproduces sexual harassment in domestic settings (Saunders, 2022).

Sexual violence has become a persistent social concern and is reported almost daily through various media outlets worldwide, including Indonesia. According to the annual report of Komnas Perempuan Indonesia in 2017, violence occurring within community settings reached 3,092 cases (22%), with sexual violence accounting for the largest proportion at 2,290 cases (74%), followed by physical violence with 490 cases (16%) (Zuhra, 2019). Among the various forms of sexual violence, sexual harassment and rape remain the most prevalent. Although women constitute the majority of victims, men may also experience sexual harassment. Likewise, perpetrators may come from diverse backgrounds, although most documented cases involve male offenders. Sexual harassment can occur across different social settings and opportunities. Nevertheless, despite its prevalence, many incidents continue to receive inadequate attention from both society and relevant authorities, partly because sexual harassment often leaves no visible physical evidence. One particularly alarming area concerns educational institutions, which are expected to serve as environments for moral development and social learning. Several high-profile cases involving lecturers at UIN Sunan Gunung Djati, Universitas Mataram, and UIN Malang have demonstrated that educational settings are not immune to sexual misconduct, thereby challenging public trust in these institutions (bbc.com, 2019).

Existing scholarship examining the relationship between patriarchy and domestic violence can generally be categorized into three major strands. First, theoretical and conceptual studies emphasize how patriarchal norms contribute to high rates of violence against women and children by legitimizing unequal power relations within households (Saunders, 2022). Second, studies on the culture of silence and silencing mechanisms explain why victims and family members often choose not to report sexual abuse, normalize abusive behavior, or prioritize family cohesion over justice (Pokharel, 2020). Third, empirical studies conducted in Indonesia document the patterns, prevalence, and handling of intrafamilial sexual harassment cases while highlighting the limitations of existing protection systems and legal responses (Sukmawati, 2023). Collectively, these studies provide valuable insights through feminist theories, national statistics, and qualitative case analyses. However, few studies have comprehensively integrated patriarchal family structures with empirical analyses of intrafamilial sexual harassment, particularly in explaining how family-based gender hierarchies actively sustain abusive practices and silence victims (Pokharel, 2020; Mardiyah, 2025).

This gap in the literature is particularly significant because many previous studies focus either on gender inequality in general or on sexual violence cases separately, without examining how patriarchal power structures within families directly shape both the occurrence and concealment of abuse. Moreover, limited research has specifically explored the phenomenon of silencing within intrafamilial sexual harassment cases. Consequently, this study seeks to address these limitations by investigating the intersection between patriarchal gender relations, family power dynamics, and the silencing of victims in domestic settings (Sepeng, 2022)

This article seeks to answer three research questions. First, how do forms of intrafamilial sexual harassment manifest, and how are such incidents reported within patriarchal family contexts? Second, what structural and cultural factors including gender norms, mechanisms of social control, and family honor ideologies contribute to both the occurrence and concealment of these cases? Third, what implications do these findings have for protection policies, case management practices, and gender-sensitive interventions aimed at preventing domestic sexual violence? Through addressing these questions, the study aims to bridge the gap between patriarchal theory and empirical evidence regarding sexual harassment in Indonesian domestic contexts.

From a criminological perspective, several factors contribute to the occurrence of sexual harassment within family environments. These include dysfunctional family conditions, economic hardship, negative peer influences, and technological developments that may facilitate exploitation. Such factors increase children's vulnerability to sexual abuse perpetrated not only by family members but also by peers and other individuals who exploit their position of trust or authority. Nevertheless, this study argues that these factors alone cannot fully explain the persistence of intrafamilial sexual harassment. Rather, sexual violence within families should be understood as the result of a broader synthesis between structural gender inequality and patriarchal power relations. These relations are reinforced through the legitimization of male authority, the silencing of victims, and the prioritization of family reputation, all of which create conditions that enable abuse to occur and persist over time (Pokharel, 2020).

The central argument of this article is that intrafamilial sexual harassment is not merely an individual act of deviance but a manifestation of unequal gender relations embedded within patriarchal family structures. Therefore, understanding and preventing sexual harassment in domestic environments requires an analytical framework that prioritizes gender relations and everyday patriarchal practices within households rather than relying solely on individual-level interventions or formal legal mechanisms that fail to address underlying power inequalities (McAlister, 2022). To achieve this objective, the study employs a critical feminist perspective on patriarchy and power relations to examine how informal family norms, control over sexuality, and honor-based practices function as determinants of vulnerability and risk. By connecting these theoretical insights with empirical evidence from Indonesian contexts, the study seeks to generate policy recommendations that emphasize the transformation of gender relations within families as a fundamental strategy for preventing and addressing intrafamilial sexual harassment.

### **Methods**

This study employed a qualitative research approach using a single case study design to examine the relationship between gender inequality, patriarchal power relations, and sexual harassment within a family environment in East Kalimantan, Indonesia. A qualitative approach was selected because it allows for an in-depth exploration of participants' lived

experiences, perceptions, and interpretations regarding gender relations, family authority structures, and the mechanisms that contribute to the occurrence and concealment of sexual harassment. The case study design was considered appropriate because it facilitates a comprehensive investigation of a social phenomenon within its real-life context, enabling the researcher to understand the complexity of interactions, power dynamics, and cultural values operating within a particular family.

The participants consisted of five informants from one family selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement and knowledge of the case under investigation. To maintain confidentiality and protect participants' identities, all informants were assigned pseudonyms. The five informants included two female survivors of intrafamilial sexual harassment (Informant A and Informant B), the victims' mother (Informant C), an older sibling who was aware of the incidents and family responses (Informant D), and a close family relative who was involved in addressing the case internally (Informant E). The inclusion criteria required participants to possess direct experiences or substantial knowledge regarding family relationships, gender dynamics, and the sexual harassment case examined in this study.

The primary research instrument was the researcher, supported by semi-structured interview guidelines designed to facilitate an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and perspectives. The interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions concerning family gender roles, decision-making patterns, authority relations, experiences of sexual harassment, disclosure processes, family responses, perceptions of family honor, and factors that contributed to silence or reporting. Field notes were utilized throughout the research process to document contextual information, participants' emotional expressions, and non-verbal communication observed during interviews. Family-related documents and relevant records available to participants were also reviewed to support data interpretation and contextual understanding.

Data collection was conducted over a two-month period through face-to-face, in-depth interviews with each participant. Prior to data collection, all informants received a detailed explanation regarding the objectives of the study and voluntarily provided informed consent. Interviews were conducted in locations chosen by participants to ensure privacy, comfort, and emotional safety. Each interview lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' permission. Considering the sensitive nature of the topic, ethical principles including confidentiality, anonymity, voluntary participation, and psychological well-being were prioritized throughout the research process.

The research procedure involved several stages. First, the researcher identified and contacted family members who met the inclusion criteria. Second, informed consent was obtained, followed by scheduling and conducting individual interviews. Third, all interview recordings were transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy of the data. Fourth, the researcher repeatedly reviewed the transcripts to gain familiarity with participants' narratives and identify emerging themes. Fifth, data were organized and coded according to recurring patterns related to gender inequality, patriarchal authority, victim silencing, family honor, and responses to sexual harassment. Finally, member checking was conducted with selected participants to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

Data analysis employed thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's six-stage framework, consisting of data familiarization, initial coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition, and report writing. Through this analytical process, major themes concerning patriarchal power relations, silencing mechanisms, family honor culture, gender inequality, and victim vulnerability were identified and interpreted using Critical Feminist

Theory and Patriarchal Theory as analytical frameworks. To ensure research rigor, credibility was strengthened through member checking, transferability through detailed descriptions of the research context, dependability through systematic documentation of research procedures, and confirmability through maintaining an audit trail throughout the analysis process. These strategies were implemented to ensure that the findings accurately reflected participants' experiences and provided a comprehensive understanding of gender inequality and sexual harassment within the family environment examined in this study.

### **Finding and Discussion**

#### ***Patriarchal Power Relations as the Structural Foundation of Intrafamilial Sexual Harassment***

The analysis of interview data revealed that patriarchal power relations constituted the primary social structure underlying the occurrence of sexual harassment within the family examined in East Kalimantan. Across all interviews, participants consistently described a family environment characterized by unequal authority, hierarchical decision-making processes, and gendered expectations that privileged male family members while limiting the autonomy of women and children. These conditions created an environment in which sexual harassment could occur repeatedly without immediate intervention from other family members.

The experiences narrated by the participants indicate that patriarchal authority was deeply embedded within everyday family life. Authority was not solely expressed through explicit commands or acts of domination. Instead, it was reproduced through routine practices, cultural values, and interpersonal interactions that normalized male leadership and female obedience. Family members frequently interpreted these arrangements as natural, appropriate, and necessary for maintaining family stability.

Informant A, a female survivor who experienced sexual harassment from a close male relative between the ages of thirteen and sixteen, described how authority operated within her family:

“My father and my uncle were always considered the most important people in the family. Nobody questioned them. Even when they were wrong, everyone remained silent. I grew up believing that older men should always be obeyed. When the harassment happened, I did not think I had the right to challenge him.”

This statement demonstrates how patriarchal authority functions as a cultural system that shapes perceptions of legitimacy and obedience. Informant A's experience suggests that the perpetrator's position within the family hierarchy provided him with symbolic power that extended beyond his individual actions. The abuse occurred within a social environment where questioning male authority was discouraged and where obedience was interpreted as a moral obligation.

Informant B shared a similar experience:

“Since childhood, I was taught that girls must respect older men and avoid confrontation. Whenever family conflicts occurred, women were expected to stay quiet and maintain harmony. Looking back, I think those lessons made it difficult for me to understand that what happened to me was abuse.”

The interview data reveal that gender socialization played a significant role in shaping vulnerability to sexual harassment. Female family members were consistently encouraged to prioritize obedience, patience, modesty, and family harmony. Male family members, in contrast, were often granted greater authority, freedom of movement, and decision-making

power. These unequal expectations produced a gendered hierarchy that structured daily interactions and influenced how family members interpreted incidents of misconduct.

The findings align with feminist scholarship arguing that patriarchy operates through institutionalized power relations that privilege men while subordinating women and children (Saunders, 2022). Patriarchal systems are maintained not only through formal authority structures but through cultural norms that define appropriate gender behavior. Within family contexts, these norms often position men as protectors, leaders, and decision-makers while assigning women the roles of caregivers, supporters, and guardians of family harmony. Such arrangements create unequal distributions of power that increase vulnerability to abuse.

The present case illustrates how patriarchal structures shape opportunities for victimization. The perpetrator's authority was reinforced by his age, gender, and social status within the family. His position enabled him to access private spaces, interact with younger family members without scrutiny, and avoid accountability when concerns emerged. Family members frequently interpreted his behavior through the lens of respectability rather than suspicion. As a result, warning signs were overlooked, and opportunities for intervention were limited.

Informant C, who was a close relative of the victim, reflected on the family dynamics surrounding the abuse:

“At that time, nobody imagined that someone respected in the family could do such things. People trusted him. If a young girl complained, most relatives would probably believe the older man first.”

This observation highlights the unequal credibility assigned to family members according to their social position. Patriarchal authority often grants adult men greater legitimacy, while women and children may struggle to have their experiences recognized as valid. Consequently, victims frequently encounter skepticism, disbelief, or minimization when attempting to disclose abuse.

Critical Feminist Theory provides an important framework for understanding these dynamics. According to feminist scholars, power should not be understood solely as direct coercion. Power also operates through social norms, cultural expectations, and institutional practices that shape what individuals perceive as possible, acceptable, or legitimate. In patriarchal family systems, power becomes embedded within everyday routines and interpersonal relationships. Family members often internalize unequal gender norms and reproduce them through their own behaviors, even when they do not consciously support gender inequality.

The interviews suggest that patriarchal power influenced not only the actions of perpetrators but also the responses of other family members. Several participants described situations in which mothers, aunts, and grandmothers encouraged silence, patience, and forgiveness rather than confrontation (Herlina, 2020). These responses were not necessarily motivated by malice. Rather, they reflected deeply internalized beliefs regarding family unity, social reputation, and appropriate gender behavior.

Informant A explained:

“My mother loved me. I know that. But she was terrified of what would happen if the family found out. She worried about conflict. She worried about gossip. She worried about being blamed. Sometimes I think she was trapped by the same system that trapped me.”

This statement demonstrates that patriarchal systems affect multiple family members simultaneously. Women may experience marginalization while also participating in practices that sustain existing power structures (Baihaqi, 1999). Feminist scholars frequently describe

this phenomenon as the reproduction of patriarchal norms through socialization and cultural expectations rather than through direct coercion alone.

The findings further indicate that patriarchal authority generated a climate of fear and self-censorship. Victims frequently monitored their own behavior, avoided discussing uncomfortable experiences, and questioned the legitimacy of their own perceptions. Several participants reported believing that disclosure would create more problems than remaining silent. Such beliefs contributed to prolonged victimization and delayed access to support services.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings support arguments that intrafamilial sexual harassment cannot be adequately understood through explanations focused exclusively on individual pathology or personal morality (Hurairah, 2012). While individual responsibility remains important, the present case demonstrates that abuse occurred within a broader social context characterized by gender inequality and unequal power relations (Essah, 2018). The perpetrator's actions were facilitated by cultural norms that legitimized male authority and discouraged challenges to family hierarchy. The findings reveal that patriarchal power relations influenced every stage of the abuse process, including victimization, disclosure, family response, and recovery. Gender inequality functioned as a structural condition shaping opportunities, expectations, and social reactions. This suggests that interventions focused solely on punishment may be insufficient if underlying power relations remain unchanged (Fakih, 2013).

Research conducted across various cultural contexts has similarly demonstrated that patriarchal family structures are associated with increased risks of domestic violence, child abuse, and sexual victimization (Foucault, 1978). Gendered power imbalances often limit victims' access to resources, reduce reporting rates, and strengthen mechanisms of social control. The present findings contribute to this body of literature by illustrating how these dynamics operate within an Indonesian family context and by highlighting the complex ways in which cultural norms, family relationships, and gender expectations interact to sustain abuse.

The evidence suggests that patriarchal power relations served as the structural foundation upon which sexual harassment occurred and remained concealed. The abuse was not an isolated event detached from social context. Rather, it emerged from a system of gendered inequalities that shaped family interactions, influenced perceptions of authority, and restricted opportunities for resistance (Handayani, 2019). Understanding these structural dimensions is therefore essential for developing effective prevention strategies and promoting gender justice within family environments.

### **Silencing Mechanisms, Family Honor, and the Normalization of Abuse**

One of the most significant findings emerging from this study concerns the existence of silencing mechanisms that systematically prevented victims from disclosing experiences of sexual harassment. The interview data demonstrate that silence was not merely an individual reaction to trauma or fear. Instead, silence functioned as a social process shaped by family expectations, cultural values, gender norms, and power relations (Hidayat, 2020). Within the family examined in East Kalimantan, disclosure was frequently perceived as a threat to family stability rather than a necessary step toward protection and justice. As a result, victims often carried the burden of secrecy while perpetrators benefited from the protection offered by family structures.

The narratives collected during the interviews reveal that victims experienced multiple forms of pressure discouraging disclosure. These pressures emerged from direct warnings,

indirect social expectations, emotional manipulation, and concerns regarding family reputation. The accumulation of these factors created an environment in which silence became the safest option available to victims despite the psychological consequences associated with maintaining secrecy.

Informant A described her internal struggle during the years in which the abuse occurred:

“I wanted to tell someone many times. Sometimes I even rehearsed what I wanted to say. Then I imagined everyone's reaction. I thought they would blame me, accuse me of destroying the family, or refuse to believe me. Eventually, staying silent felt easier than facing those possibilities.”

This statement illustrates how silencing mechanisms operate before disclosure even occurs. The victim's anticipation of negative reactions shaped her behavior and discouraged attempts to seek help (Kusuma, 2023). The fear of disbelief, blame, and rejection became internalized, influencing decision-making processes long before any actual conversation took place.

Informant B expressed a similar experience:

“I was afraid people would ask why I didn't stop it. I thought they would question my behavior instead of questioning the person who hurt me. That fear stayed with me for years.”

The interviews suggest that anticipated victim-blaming represented one of the most powerful barriers to disclosure. Victims frequently believed that family members would scrutinize their actions, clothing, behavior, or credibility rather than focusing on the perpetrator's misconduct. Such expectations contributed to self-doubt and delayed reporting.

These findings align with previous studies demonstrating that victim-blaming remains a persistent obstacle in sexual violence cases across different cultural contexts (McAlister, 2022; Simeon, 2022). Victims often internalize social messages suggesting that they bear responsibility for preventing abuse. Consequently, disclosure becomes associated with shame and self-criticism rather than support and validation. The findings further reveal that family honor played a central role in maintaining silence. Discussions regarding reputation appeared repeatedly throughout the interviews, indicating that concerns about public image strongly influenced family responses to sexual harassment. Participants described a social environment in which maintaining family respectability was frequently prioritized over addressing harm experienced by victims.

Informant C reflected on conversations that occurred after suspicions regarding the abuse began to emerge:

“Some relatives were more concerned about what neighbors would think than about what had happened. People kept saying things like ‘don't let this become public’ or ‘we need to protect the family's name.’”

This statement demonstrates how family honor functioned as a mechanism of social control. Rather than encouraging transparency and accountability, concerns regarding reputation redirected attention away from the victim's experiences and toward the potential social consequences of disclosure (Mardiyah, 2025). Family members became preoccupied with managing external perceptions rather than confronting internal problems.

Informant E, a gender and child protection practitioner, explained:

“In many sexual violence cases, the first response from families is not concern for the victim. The first response is often fear. Families worry about gossip, social judgment, damaged relationships, and public embarrassment.”

The emphasis on family reputation reflects broader cultural patterns identified in research concerning honor-based social systems. Scholars have argued that family honor frequently becomes linked to the behavior, sexuality, and perceived purity of women and girls. Under such conditions, experiences of sexual violence are often interpreted as threats to collective



identity rather than violations of individual rights (Pokharel, 2020). Consequently, families may discourage reporting in an effort to preserve social status.

Within the present study, family honor appeared to function through several interconnected mechanisms. First, it encouraged secrecy by framing disclosure as socially dangerous. Second, it shifted responsibility from perpetrators to victims by treating public exposure as the primary problem. Third, it generated emotional pressure on victims to remain silent for the perceived benefit of the family. Together, these mechanisms contributed to the normalization of abuse and the continuation of unequal power relations.

Another important finding concerns the normalization of abusive behavior. Several participants described family environments in which inappropriate conduct was minimized, rationalized, or dismissed as insignificant (Melmer, 2023). Such responses prevented early intervention and reduced opportunities for protection.

Informant A recalled:

“When I tried to hint that something was wrong, some relatives said he was probably joking. Others told me not to think too much. It made me question myself.”

This statement highlights how normalization operates through everyday interactions. By interpreting inappropriate behavior as harmless, family members unintentionally reinforced conditions that enabled abuse to continue (Nugroho, 2021). Victims received messages suggesting that their discomfort was exaggerated, irrational, or unimportant.

Informant D, the social worker, provided additional insight:

“Many families do not immediately recognize warning signs because they are accustomed to unequal power relations. Certain behaviors become normalized simply because they have existed for a long time.”

This observation is particularly significant from a feminist perspective. Feminist scholars argue that patriarchal systems often normalize behaviors that reinforce male dominance while marginalizing the experiences of women and children. Over time, repeated exposure to unequal power relations can make abusive conduct appear ordinary rather than problematic. The normalization process therefore reduces sensitivity to warning signs and weakens protective responses.

The interview data indicate that normalization occurred through language, family traditions, and patterns of interaction. Participants described hearing statements such as “he is just being friendly,” “he did not mean anything by it,” or “that is simply how men behave.” Such narratives minimized the seriousness of misconduct and shifted attention away from victims' concerns. The findings further reveal that emotional manipulation constituted another important silencing mechanism. Victims frequently reported being encouraged to prioritize family harmony over personal well-being. Messages emphasizing sacrifice, forgiveness, and loyalty were often directed toward victims rather than perpetrators.

Informant B explained:

“I was told to think about my mother's feelings. People said the situation would hurt everyone if it became public. Eventually I felt responsible for protecting the family even though I was the one who had been hurt.”

This statement demonstrates how emotional responsibility was transferred from perpetrators to victims. Rather than receiving protection and support, victims were expected to manage the emotional consequences of disclosure for other family members. Such expectations increased psychological burdens and reinforced silence. From the perspective of Critical Feminist Theory, these dynamics illustrate how power operates through emotional and symbolic mechanisms rather than solely through physical coercion. Family members did not necessarily force victims into silence through explicit threats (Rohmah, 2022). Instead,

silence emerged through a combination of cultural expectations, emotional obligations, social norms, and concerns regarding reputation. Power was exercised through the ability to shape what could be discussed, who could speak, and which experiences were considered legitimate.

The concept of silencing is particularly useful for understanding these findings. Silencing refers to social processes that restrict individuals' ability to express experiences, seek recognition, or challenge dominant narratives. In the present case, victims encountered barriers at multiple levels (Junaidi, 2024). Internal barriers included fear, shame, and self-doubt. Interpersonal barriers included victim-blaming, disbelief, and emotional pressure. Structural barriers included patriarchal norms, gender inequality, and family honor ideologies. The interaction of these factors created a powerful system that discouraged disclosure and protected existing power relations.

The findings suggest that silence should not be interpreted as evidence that abuse did not occur. On the contrary, prolonged silence often reflected the strength of social pressures surrounding victims (Wismayanti, 2019). The absence of disclosure was frequently a consequence of unequal power relations rather than a lack of harm. Understanding this distinction is essential for improving responses to sexual violence within family contexts.

The normalization of abuse and the maintenance of silence ultimately served the interests of perpetrators while increasing risks for victims. Family members who prioritized reputation over accountability contributed, intentionally or unintentionally, to the continuation of harmful conditions (Junaidi, 2025). These findings reinforce arguments that effective prevention requires cultural transformation alongside legal and institutional reforms. Addressing sexual harassment within families necessitates challenging social norms that equate family honor with secrecy and replacing them with values that prioritize safety, dignity, and justice for victims.

### **Gender Inequality, Victim Vulnerability, and Policy Implications**

The final theme emerging from the analysis concerns the relationship between gender inequality, victim vulnerability, and the broader implications for policies addressing sexual harassment within family environments. The findings indicate that unequal gender relations not only contributed to the occurrence of sexual harassment but also shaped victims' ability to recognize abuse, seek support, access protection mechanisms, and pursue justice. Gender inequality functioned as a multidimensional process that influenced socialization patterns, family expectations, emotional development, access to resources, and perceptions of authority. Consequently, vulnerability to sexual harassment cannot be understood solely through individual characteristics or isolated incidents. Vulnerability was socially produced through structural arrangements that positioned women and children in subordinate roles within family hierarchies.

The interviews reveal that gender norms were introduced at an early age and became deeply embedded in participants' understanding of family relationships. Female participants consistently described being taught values emphasizing obedience, modesty, patience, emotional restraint, and respect toward male authority figures. While these values were often presented as important moral principles, they also created conditions that limited the ability of girls and young women to challenge inappropriate behavior.

Informant B explained:

“Since I was very young, I was told that a good daughter listens to older family members and avoids conflict. I learned to stay quiet when something felt uncomfortable because speaking up was often considered disrespectful.”

This statement demonstrates how gender socialization shaped behavioral expectations long before the occurrence of abuse. The participant had internalized norms emphasizing compliance and harmony, making it difficult to resist or question actions committed by individuals occupying positions of authority (Hurairah, 2012). Such findings support feminist arguments that gender inequality operates through everyday socialization processes that influence how individuals perceive themselves and their relationships with others (Saunders, 2022).

Informant A similarly reflected on her childhood experiences:

“Girls in my family were expected to be polite, calm, and obedient. Boys had more freedom. Looking back, I think those differences affected how we viewed ourselves. The boys seemed more confident expressing opinions, while girls were expected to adjust.”

The interviews suggest that gendered expectations contributed to unequal levels of confidence, autonomy, and decision-making capacity. Male family members often received greater opportunities to express disagreement, participate in discussions, and exercise independence. Female family members were frequently encouraged to prioritize accommodation and relational harmony. These differences shaped the social environment in which abuse occurred and influenced the ways victims responded when confronted with inappropriate behavior.

Critical Feminist Theory provides an important framework for interpreting these findings. Feminist scholars argue that gender inequality is maintained through systems that distribute power unevenly according to socially constructed gender roles (Adawiyah, 2026). Such systems influence access to authority, resources, opportunities, and social recognition. Within family contexts, unequal gender relations frequently position women and children as dependent upon individuals who hold greater economic, social, or symbolic power. This dependency can reduce opportunities for resistance and increase vulnerability to various forms of abuse.

The findings reveal that vulnerability extended beyond physical exposure to perpetrators. Psychological vulnerability emerged as a recurring theme throughout the interviews. Several participants described experiences of confusion, self-doubt, and uncertainty regarding the legitimacy of their own feelings (Junaidi, 2025). Gender norms emphasizing obedience and deference often made it difficult for victims to identify abusive behavior or trust their own perceptions.

Informant A stated:

“At first, I did not even realize that what happened was sexual harassment. I knew it made me uncomfortable, but I thought maybe I was being sensitive or misunderstanding the situation.”

This statement highlights an important dimension of vulnerability. Victims often struggled to interpret their experiences because dominant social narratives encouraged trust in older family members and discouraged critical evaluation of authority figures. As a result, abusive behavior was frequently recognized only after prolonged exposure or external validation.

Informant D, a social worker who had assisted numerous survivors of sexual violence, explained:

“Many victims blame themselves before they blame perpetrators. They spend years questioning whether their experiences are serious enough to report. This self-doubt is very common.”

The persistence of self-blame reflects broader patterns identified within research on sexual violence. Studies consistently demonstrate that victims frequently internalize responsibility for abuse, particularly in environments where gender inequality and victim-

blaming attitudes remain prevalent (McAlister, 2022). Such processes contribute to psychological distress and reduce the likelihood of reporting. The interviews further indicate that economic dependency increased vulnerability in important ways. Several participants described situations in which family members relied financially on individuals occupying positions of authority within the household. This dependency created additional barriers to disclosure because reporting abuse was perceived as threatening family stability and economic security.

Informant C reflected on these challenges:

“Some family members knew something was wrong, but they were afraid of what would happen if the situation became public. The person involved contributed financially to the household. People worried about the consequences.”

This finding illustrates how economic factors interact with patriarchal power structures. Authority within families is often reinforced through control over financial resources. Individuals who contribute significantly to household income may acquire additional influence, making it more difficult for others to challenge their behavior. Consequently, victims may face pressure to remain silent in order to preserve economic stability. The findings also reveal significant limitations within existing support systems. Although legal frameworks addressing sexual violence have expanded in Indonesia, participants reported uncertainty regarding reporting procedures, concerns about confidentiality, and fears of negative social consequences. These perceptions reduced willingness to seek formal assistance.

Informant B explained:

“I did not know where to go for help. I knew there were institutions that handled these cases, but everything felt complicated and frightening.”

Similarly, Informant A stated:

“I worried that people would not believe me. I thought the process would be exhausting and that I would have to explain everything repeatedly.”

These statements indicate that institutional accessibility remains an important concern. Even when support services exist, victims may hesitate to utilize them if procedures appear intimidating, complex, or emotionally burdensome. Effective protection therefore requires more than legal availability. It requires systems that are accessible, trustworthy, survivor-centered, and responsive to the realities experienced by victims.

Informant E, a gender and child protection practitioner, emphasized this issue:

“Many policies focus on what happens after violence is reported. We still need stronger prevention strategies and community education programs that address the root causes of abuse.”

This observation highlights the importance of shifting attention toward structural prevention. The findings of this study suggest that interventions focused exclusively on prosecution and punishment may have limited effectiveness if underlying gender inequalities remain unaddressed (Dewi, 2024). Sexual harassment within families emerges from broader social systems that shape beliefs, behaviors, and power relations. Prevention efforts must therefore target these systems alongside individual cases. From a policy perspective, the findings point toward several important priorities. First, gender equality education should be introduced at early stages of social development. Educational programs should encourage critical reflection regarding gender stereotypes, bodily autonomy, consent, children's rights, and respectful interpersonal relationships (Aryasatya, 2025). Such initiatives can help challenge norms that normalize unequal power relations and discourage disclosure.

Second, family-based interventions should be strengthened. Families represent the primary social environment in which children develop understandings of authority, gender,

and interpersonal behavior. Prevention programs should therefore involve parents and caregivers in discussions regarding healthy communication, child protection, gender equality, and non-violent family relationships. Strengthening protective capacities within families may reduce vulnerability and improve responses when concerns arise.

Third, survivor-centered support services require continued expansion. Participants repeatedly emphasized the importance of accessible counseling, psychological assistance, legal guidance, and community support networks (Dewi, 2020). Services should be designed to minimize secondary victimization and ensure that survivors receive respectful, confidential, and comprehensive assistance throughout recovery processes. Fourth, public awareness campaigns should address persistent myths surrounding sexual violence. Misconceptions regarding victim responsibility, family honor, and reporting behaviors continue to discourage disclosure and contribute to stigmatization. Community education initiatives can play an important role in challenging these beliefs and promoting more supportive responses toward survivors.

Fifth, collaboration between educational institutions, community organizations, child protection agencies, healthcare providers, and legal authorities should be strengthened. Sexual harassment within family environments represents a complex social issue requiring coordinated responses across multiple sectors. Effective prevention and intervention depend upon communication, cooperation, and shared commitments to child protection and gender justice.

From the perspective of Critical Feminist Theory, these policy recommendations reflect the understanding that sexual harassment is rooted in unequal social relations rather than isolated individual actions. Patriarchal power structures influence opportunities, vulnerabilities, and responses to abuse. Sustainable change therefore requires transforming the social conditions that permit violence to occur. Legal reforms remain essential; however, legal reforms alone cannot dismantle deeply embedded gender inequalities. The findings of this study demonstrate that gender inequality influenced every stage of the victimization process. It shaped childhood socialization, affected perceptions of authority, contributed to self-doubt, reinforced silence, limited access to support, and influenced family responses to disclosure. Vulnerability emerged through the interaction of cultural norms, economic conditions, emotional expectations, and patriarchal power relations. Understanding these interconnected factors is essential for developing comprehensive approaches to prevention and protection.

The East Kalimantan case illustrates that sexual harassment within family environments should be understood as a structural issue closely connected to gender inequality. Victims were not vulnerable because of personal weaknesses or individual characteristics. Their vulnerability emerged within social systems that distributed power unequally and normalized hierarchical relationships. Addressing sexual harassment therefore requires a commitment to gender equality, survivor-centered support, family transformation, and broader cultural change. Through such efforts, families can become spaces of protection, dignity, and safety rather than environments in which abuse remains hidden behind silence and unequal power relations.

### **Conclusion**

This study demonstrates that intrafamilial sexual harassment is closely linked to patriarchal gender relations that produce unequal power structures within families. The findings reveal that male authority, family honor, and silencing mechanisms contribute to the occurrence and concealment of sexual harassment, increasing victims' vulnerability and limiting opportunities for disclosure. Gender inequality shapes victims' experiences through

socialization, dependency, and restricted agency. The study concludes that preventing sexual harassment requires not only legal protection but also the transformation of patriarchal family norms, gender-sensitive education, survivor-centered support systems, and broader efforts to promote gender equality and social justice.

### **Bibliography**

- Aryasatya, A. Y., Junaidi, M. I. S., & Thofhani, L. N. A. (2025). Deconstruction of patriarchal authority in religious interpretation (Analysis of Minister of Religious Affairs Nasaruddin Umar's statement on the monopoly of religious interpretation in Indonesia in 2025). *Jurnal Pengabdian Masyarakat dan Riset Pendidikan*, 4(1), 6195–6203.
- Adawiyah, R., & Junaidi, M. I. S. (2026). Pengaruh pola asuh orang tua terhadap motivasi belajar anak dalam perspektif psikologi pendidikan pada masa perkembangan kognitif. *Ma'rifah: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 2(1), 46–58.
- Baihaqi, M. I. (1999). *Kekerasan terhadap anak: Perspektif psikologi dan sosial*. Refika Aditama.
- Dewi, N. K. (2020). *Patriarki dan kekuasaan dalam budaya Indonesia: Kajian kritis terhadap relasi gender*. Pustaka Pelajar.
- Dewi, N. P. A. M. (2024). How does patriarchy contribute to domestic violence in Indonesian families. *Fakultas Ushuluddin dan Filsafat, UIN Suska Riau*.
- Essah, M. S., & Hamidah. (2018). Pelecehan seksual terhadap perempuan dan anak dalam perspektif sosial. *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial*, 5(2), 87–102.
- Fakih, M. (2013). *Analisis gender dan transformasi sosial*. Pustaka Pelajar.
- Foucault, M. (1978). *The history of sexuality: Volume 1: An introduction*. Pantheon Books.
- Handayani, T. (2019). *Perempuan, kerja, dan keluarga: Analisis peran gender di Indonesia*. UMM Press.
- Herlina, S. (2020). *Pelecehan seksual dalam ruang domestik: Perspektif psikologi dan sosial*. Rajawali Pers.
- Hidayat, A. (2020). Konstruksi sosial gender dalam keluarga Indonesia. *Jurnal Sosiologi Reflektif*, 15(2), 201–214.
- Hurairah, A. (2012). *Kekerasan terhadap anak*. Nuansa Cendekia.
- Indonesian Judicial Research Society. (2022). *An outlook on sexual violence case handling in Indonesia*. IJRS Publication.
- Junaidi, M. I. S. (2025). Makna hidup Jamaah Gereja Ortodoks Dionysius Zakhynthos Yogyakarta. *Jurnal Sains, Sosial, dan Studi Agama*, 1(6), 630–640.
- Kusuma, D. R. (2023). Dampak trauma dan pola kekerasan turun-temurun pada korban pelecehan seksual. *Jurnal Psikologi Sosial dan Kemanusiaan*, 8(1), 55–70.
- Lestari, M. (2021). Budaya permisif dan kurangnya pendidikan seks pada kasus pelecehan anak. *Jurnal Pendidikan dan Perempuan*, 7(2), 134–148.
- Mardiyah, S. (2025). Trends of child sexual abuse in Indonesia: A bibliometric review of national publications 2014–2024. *Universitas Kristen Petra Repository*. <https://repository.petra.ac.id>
- Junaidi, M. I. S. (2025). Pewarisan makna simbolik peretup/peretus dalam tradisi pengobatan di Dusun Paokkambut Kecamatan Labuapi Lombok Barat. *AT-TAKLIM: Jurnal Pendidikan Multidisiplin*, 2(4), 9–19.
- McAlister, S. (2022). Gender, violence, and cultures of silence: A qualitative study of victim experiences. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 31(4), 456–470.
- Melmer, J. (2023). *Intrafamilial sexual harassment: Dynamics, disclosure, and recovery*. Routledge.
- Junaidi, M. I. S. (2025). Kohesi sosial pada komunitas Jamaah Sapta Dharma di Taman Siswa Yogyakarta. *Jurnal Moderasi*, 5(1), 15–31.
- Nugroho, R. (2021). *Gender dan pembangunan: Studi atas ideologi patriarki di Indonesia*. Kompas.
- Pokharel, B. (2020). Factors influencing silencing of women who experience violence. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 83, 102–118.

## **Gender Inequality and Sexual Harassment in Family Environments: a Case Study of a Family in East Kalimantan**

*Fitri Rosanti*

- Putri, A. N. (2022). Keluarga sebagai ruang aman? Analisis kasus pelecehan seksual terhadap anak. *Jurnal Hukum dan Keadilan Sosial*, 10(1), 44–59.
- Rahmawati, D. (2023). Normalisasi kekerasan dan pelecehan seksual dalam sistem patriarki. *Jurnal Studi Feminisme dan Sosial*, 5(3), 189–204.
- Rismayadi, D. (2025). Patriarchal dominance as a contributor to domestic violence in Indonesian society. *Al-Wa'ie: Journal of Islamic Studies and Social Development*, 8(2), 145–162.
- Rohmah, L. (2022). Ketimpangan gender dan kekerasan seksual di ranah domestik. *Jurnal Gender dan Anak*, 9(1), 72–88.
- Russell, D. E. H., Smith, C., & Brown, K. (2025). *Hidden wounds: Sexual violence in families*. Springer.
- Saunders, D. G. (2022). Patriarchy and intimate partner violence: Theoretical links and empirical evidence. *Journal of Family Studies*, 18(2), 123–139.
- Santi, K. E. (2024). *Power abuse in child sexual violence cases in Indonesia*. UI Press.
- Sari, M. (2021). Ideologi patriarki dan perempuan dalam perspektif feminisme kritis. *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial dan Humaniora*, 12(2), 101–115.
- Sepeng, N. V. (2022). The role of patriarchy and its influence on domestic violence. *Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care*, 11(3), 1245–1251.
- Siregar, N. (2020). Ketimpangan gender dan akses perempuan terhadap keadilan. *Jurnal Hukum dan Pembangunan*, 50(3), 276–291.
- Sukmawati, C. (2023). Stagnation of sexual violation in children and family in Indonesia. *Open Journal Unimal*, 5(1), 1–15.
- Susanti, E. (2019). *Perempuan dan kekuasaan dalam struktur sosial keluarga*. Alfabeta.
- UNICEF. (2021). *Child sexual abuse in family environments: Global perspectives and prevention strategies*. UNICEF.
- Walby, S. (1990). *Theorizing patriarchy*. Basil Blackwell.
- WHO. (2020). *Responding to child sexual abuse: Guidelines for health and social services*. World Health Organization.
- Wismayanti, Y. F., O'Leary, P., Tilbury, C., & Tjoe, Y. (2019). Child sexual abuse in Indonesia: A systematic review of literature, law and policy. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 95, 104045. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2019.104045>
- Wulandari, I. (2021). Relasi kekuasaan dalam ketimpangan gender di lingkungan domestik. *Jurnal Kajian Sosial dan Budaya*, 6(2), 90–104.