



Understanding male victimization in sexual harassment: A gender literacy analysis of patriarchal masculinity construction

Ajrun 'Azhim Al As'hal^{1,*}, Ramadhanita Mustika Sari¹, Mega Adjie Wikhda¹

¹ Department of Library and Information Science, Faculty of Interdisciplinary Islamic Studies, Universitas Islam Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta, Special Region of Yogyakarta 55281, Indonesia.

*Correspondence: 23200012015@student.uin-suka.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

Background: Sexual harassment is one of the negative acts that has a big impact on the victims. Not only women but men today can also become victims of sexual harassment. Even the perpetrators of sexual harassment are women. This research aims to analyze the phenomenon of sexual harassment in men. The research problem focuses on the victimization of men through sexual harassment. As well as finding out the extent of society's understanding regarding gender and sexuality literacy. **Methods:** This study uses a qualitative research design with an ethnographic approach to describe the life experiences of eight deliberately selected informants. Primary data obtained through purposive sampling is integrated with a critical review of relevant literature to place male victimization in the broader context of sociocultural and digital structures. **Finding:** The findings indicate that society still demonstrates a low level of understanding regarding gender and sexuality. This lack of awareness contributes to the normalization and trivialization of sexual harassment against men, causing many male victims to remain silent due to fear of stigma, disbelief, or ridicule. Such attitudes reflect deeply embedded patriarchal norms that hinder open discussions about men's vulnerability and reinforce gender stereotypes that portray men as invulnerable. **Conclusion:** This study concludes that sexual harassment against men in cyberspace tends to be normalized and ignored due to the strong influence of patriarchal masculinity norms that demand men to always appear dominant. **Novelty/Originality of this article:** This study offers originality through its in-depth exploration of male victimization in sexual harassment a topic that remains underrepresented in academic discourse. By examining the social ignorance and gender bias that silence male victims, this research challenges dominant gender narratives and reveals critical gaps in public understanding of gender, sexuality, and patriarchal masculinity within both offline and digital spaces.

KEYWORDS: gender literacy; male victimization; patriarchal masculinity; sexual harassment.

1. Introduction

The widespread use of the internet makes it easier for people to communicate and find information in real time. Based on a survey from the Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) in Indonesia in 2024, it is stated that internet users will reach 278,696,200 people out of a total Indonesian population of 278,696,200 in 2023 (Attar, 2024). Meanwhile, social media users alone were recorded at 139 million social media users or equivalent to 49.9% of the population (Annur, 2024). Through the convenience provided in the digital world, or

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what is often called cyberspace, it not only has a positive effect on its audience but also has an adverse effect (Djufri & Absi, 2022). Starting from the spread of hoax news, fraud, and cyberbullying (Fawareh & Alanazi, 2026). Cyberbullying is an act of someone bullying someone through the use of digital technology, either through social media or other online platforms. The act of cyberbullying itself has various forms, ranging from flaming (provoking someone to insult), outing and trickery (spreading other people's secrets or disgrace), Cyberstalking (stalking that aims to find out people's identity or ugliness), impersonation (impersonating to demonise people), denigration (defamation), to sexual harassment (Nurassani, 2020).

Sexual harassment is an act or destructive behaviour that leads to something related to sexuality that is deliberately carried out by someone without the knowledge of the object (victim), which certainly hurts the object, such as embarrassment, anger, and offence (Nasution et al., 2025). So the occurrence of sexual harassment has a substantial physical and psychological impact or trauma (Rodríguez et al., 2025). The phenomenon of sexual harassment is not only experienced by women. However, it can also happen to men. According to data explained by the Quantitative Study of the Gender Equality Barometer, initiated by the Indonesia Judicial Research Society (IJRS) and INFID in 2020, 33% of men have experienced harassment (Ashila & Barus, 2023). The same thing was also conveyed by the Safe Public Space Coalition (KPRA), researching 62,224 male respondents, explaining that 1 in 10 men had experienced sexual harassment in public spaces.

SIMFONI-PPA (2024) added that until January 2024, the number of harassment cases in Indonesia was 8,572, with details of male victims 1,876, while women were 7,482 cases (KEMENPPA, 2024). Although the data on harassment that occurs to men is indeed less than that of women, it does not mean that men will not be able to become targets of sexual harassment, as happened to Pradikta Wicaksono, who is familiarly called Dikta (Fundraka, 2023). Dikta is one of the singers on the rise today and is loved by women (Tionardus & Pangerang, 2024). Because of his fame, he had just become a victim of sexual harassment after filling an event at Sarinah, Jakarta on Sunday (15/1/2023), where the singer's vital organs were squeezed (Dedi, 2023). However, what is even more sad is that there are still some people (netizens) who feel the incident is a joke and laugh at the victim, and some even feel jealous of the perpetrator for holding the victim's vital organs. The incident shows that there is a difference between sexual harassment that occurs to men and women. Because the harassment that men get is still constructed on the stigma of masculinity, so that men who get the harassment are considered weak and unable to maintain and protect their manhood, this situation certainly has an impact and burden for men (Moscatelli et al., 2025). This situation makes men reluctant to report and follow up on cases of sexual harassment that occur to them.

Research on sexual harassment has been conducted before, such as Rosemary et al., (2024), who examined the relationship between anonymity and cyber sexual harassment in Twitter application users. Through his research, it is explained that there is a relationship between users who do not know each other (anonymity) and the desire of Twitter users to commit digital sexual harassment. Lorensa & Elisa, (2024) in their research revealed that in the era of technology, cases of sexual harassment are increasing, primarily through online media or what is often known as cyber sexual harassment. Syatar et al., (2022) discuss sexual harassment in both verbal and nonverbal forms that are increasingly widespread in cyberspace. So, legal strengthening is needed for the perpetrators.

Research on male victimization through sexual harassment is crucial for at least two main reasons. First, sexual harassment experienced by men is often perceived as normal or trivial, despite being as serious and harmful as harassment experienced by women. Second, limited societal understanding of gender and sexuality literacy reinforces toxic masculinity and rigid expectations of male potency, placing a moral burden on men and discouraging them from reporting experiences of sexual harassment. As a result, cases of sexual harassment against men remain underreported and socially marginalized.

In response to these conditions, this study focuses on male victimization in sexual harassment, both offline and within digital environments. The study aims to demonstrate

that men can also be victims of sexual harassment, including cases in which perpetrators are both women and men, and to examine the extent to which gender and sexuality literacy shapes societal perceptions and responses to male victimization. Based on these gaps, this study explicitly addresses the following research questions: (1) how male victimization in sexual harassment is experienced and interpreted across offline and digital contexts; (2) how patriarchal constructions of masculinity influence societal responses to male victims; and (3) to what extent gender and sexuality literacy contributes to the normalization or silencing of male victimization.

Beyond its academic contribution, this study holds significant policy relevance. Understanding male victimization is essential for developing more inclusive gender policies, strengthening sexual harassment prevention frameworks, and improving gender and sexuality education. The findings are expected to inform policymakers, educational institutions, and digital platform regulators about the importance of integrating gender literacy into curricula, public awareness campaigns, and reporting mechanisms that recognize men as potential victims of sexual harassment. By addressing male victimization, this research supports more comprehensive and equitable approaches to preventing gender-based violence in both offline and digital contexts.

2. Methods

2.1 Research design

This study employs a qualitative research design with an ethnographic approach (Safrudin et al., 2023), which is considered most appropriate for understanding the cultural, social, and emotional dimensions surrounding the phenomenon of sexual harassment against men. The ethnographic approach enables the researcher to explore deeply the values, behaviors, and meanings that exist within particular social and digital contexts, especially regarding how male victims of sexual harassment are perceived and how such perceptions are constructed and sustained through everyday interactions. Through prolonged engagement and close observation, this method allows the researcher to capture participants' lived experiences and the contextual factors shaping societal responses to male victimization.

The study involved eight informants selected through purposive sampling based on their relevance and direct or indirect experience with the research topic. Informants were chosen to represent multiple perspectives, including victims, educators, professionals, and social observers. The participants consisted of two guidance and counseling teachers (AA, MN), one homeroom teacher (SK), one male student who experienced sexual harassment in a school context (OM), and four additional informants from diverse professional backgrounds: a telemarketer who had observed online harassment (AN), a teacher and eyewitness who assisted victims (NPH), a psychologist with experience handling harassment cases (KK), and a social media activist engaged in gender advocacy and analysis of online harassment (FBA). This diversity of informants ensured a multi-layered understanding of male sexual harassment across educational, psychological, and digital spheres.

2.2 Data collection and analysis

The collected data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model, which involves three interconnected stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. During the data reduction stage, interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were systematically coded and categorised to identify recurring themes such as gender stereotypes, patriarchal masculinity, societal normalisation of harassment, and psychological impacts on male victims. The data display stage involved organizing the coded data into thematic matrices and narrative summaries to identify patterns and relationships across different informants and data sources. Finally,

conclusions were drawn and continuously verified through comparison across cases and data types to ensure analytical consistency.

To ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of the findings, several validation strategies were employed. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing data obtained from victims, educators, experts, and digital observers, while method triangulation involved cross-checking findings from interviews, observations, and document analysis. Member checking was applied by sharing preliminary interpretations with selected informants to confirm the accuracy of representations and interpretations. Prolonged engagement in the field further strengthened contextual understanding and minimized researcher bias.

Ethical principles were strictly upheld throughout the research process. All participants provided informed consent prior to data collection and were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Pseudonyms and coded identifiers were used to protect participants' identities. Given the sensitive and stigmatized nature of sexual harassment, particular care was taken to ensure participants' psychological well-being, and interviews were conducted in a respectful and non-judgmental manner.

Table 1. Profile of informants

Code	Gender	Age	Occupation	Related experience	Status
AA	Male	34	Counseling Teacher	Handled harassment cases	Expert
MN	Female	29	Counseling Teacher	Guided student victims	Expert
SK	Female	31	Homeroom Teacher	Handled school harassment	Witness
OM	Male	18	Student	Experienced harassment	Victim
AN	Male	24	Telemarketer	Observed online harassment	Witness
NPH	Male	33	Teacher & Witness	Assisted victims	Witness
KK	Female	30	Psychologist	Consulted harassment cases	Expert
FBA	Female	27	Social Media Activist	Advocated gender issues	Expert

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Gender and sexuality literacy

Literacy is a person's ability or skill to know something (Zimmerman, 2025). Literacy is not limited to information literacy. However, now it has spread to other scopes. One of them is literacy in the field of gender and sexuality. Gender and sexuality literacy is a person's ability to understand the concepts of gender and sex (Haruna, 2018). However, there are still many people who cannot clearly distinguish between these two concepts, leading to a common misconception that gender and sex are the same. This lack of understanding often results in the persistence of stereotypes and discrimination, especially against individuals who do not conform to traditional gender norms. Improving gender and sexuality literacy can therefore play a crucial role in fostering inclusivity and equality in society (Amaral et al., 2025). Educational institutions and social organizations have a strategic role in promoting this literacy through comprehensive education and awareness programs. By increasing public understanding of gender and sexuality concepts, communities can develop more empathetic attitudes toward diversity. Ultimately, literacy in this field contributes to a more just, informed, and respectful social environment.

"There are still many people who do not know what the difference between gender and sexuality is. Most of those who know the difference are educated people only"
(KK/27/06/2025)

Gender is a social construct that distinguishes men and women and has been present in society, ultimately triggering social obligations and gender roles (Haruna, 2018). At the same time, sex itself is a difference in function and form, biologically owned by men and women (Chaudhary et al., 2025). So it can be concluded that gender and sexuality are different. Gender is more inclined to roles, while sexuality or sex is classified as reproductive

organs. This statement is also in line with one of the informants, who explained that gender means personality while sexuality is natural.

"Gender is a personality; a man's personality is firm, and a woman's personality is delicate and gentle. Whereas sexuality is sex, nature or what has been there since we were born" (FBA/02/08/2025)

No wonder gender literacy in Indonesia is still relatively low (Fawaid & Handayani, 2025). Evidenced by a report from the World Economic Forum (WEF) in the Gender Gap Report 2023, which explains that Indonesia's Global Gap Index (GGGI) is 0.697 points in 2023 and has not changed from 2022 (Pratiwi, 2023). Low gender and sexuality literacy has a significant impact on a country. The lack of literacy about gender and sexuality has resulted in many gender and sexuality-related crimes. Starting from gender inequality to harassment that occurs in many places. This condition indicates that there remains a significant gap between formal policies and the actual understanding and social practices within society. Therefore, improving gender and sexuality literacy is an essential agenda for building a more equitable and gender-aware society.

"The impact of people's lack of understanding about gender and sexuality is terrible. Because they still normalise the equality between gender and sexuality. So it is no wonder that there is still much harassment. For example, catcalling. Catcalling is still considered normal between men and women, even though this is considered harassment" (AA/20/10/2025)

The same thing was conveyed by the next informant, who explained that the lack of gender literacy makes it easy for many people to commit acts of harassment. This indicates that limited understanding about gender and sexuality not only perpetuates stereotypes but also normalizes various forms of discriminatory behavior in everyday interactions. Consequently, efforts to enhance gender literacy become crucial as part of preventive measures against harassment and as a way to cultivate a more respectful social culture.

"Nowadays, the situation is getting worse; harassment is happening more and more, not only in the form of actions but also in words. Even though it is not a word about vulgarity, I think it is harassment. Like talking to a friend with the words nerd, that is harassment." (AN/21/08/2025)

Both statements explain that the lack of literacy about gender and sexuality has a significant impact on its victims (Krahé, 2025). Harassment is not just about speaking vulgarities; mockery and diatribes are also considered harassment. Harassment is any act or word that can make someone feel intimidated, harassed, or humiliated (Mishra, 2026). Harassment occurs because of the deliberate appearance of the perpetrator, and the perpetrator feels there is an opportunity to carry out the harassment, such as the victim who deliberately wears open clothes in places and conditions that allow harassment (Ahyun et al., 2022). Even now, harassment is not only done by men to women. Harassment can happen to men. As the case was told by the two informants.

"When I was in college, one of the male renters was there. In that rented house, there were a lot of complex mothers who often teased the residents. Often calling my friends and me. So you could say the aunties were flirting with the boys" (OM/10/10/2025)

"My friend used to have a male acquaintance from the gym. After watching, my friend was invited to his house to help with something. However, when she got home, it turned out that she wanted to be harassed by her male friend. Fortunately, at that time, he could ask for help from the residents and the security guard" (OM/10/10/2025)

Harassment that happens to men is not limited to women. It can also happen to other men. Factors causing the harassment arise from the lack of self-control, the environment, and the spectacle of poor quality (Saifuddin, 2021). Therefore, gender and sexuality literacy is needed to prevent the crime of sexual harassment. One way is by organising learning about the importance of gender and sexuality studies. Learning about gender and sexuality is still considered unimportant and has not been included in the primary curriculum (Fainu & Fitzpatrick, 2024). Many argue that gender and sexuality studies do not have the full benefits and importance compared to other subjects such as science, social studies, and language.

"Gender and sexuality education is important. However, until now, there have been no schools that teach it. Many people think that learning about gender and sexuality is taboo and pornographic. Even though it is essential, at least people know the difference between gender and sex." (MN/20/06/2025)

There is a lack of attention from the government to the importance of understanding gender and sexuality. Making many parties, especially gender activists, voice and educate about the importance of gender and sexuality. Like Saparinah Sadli. She is an activist for gender equality in Indonesia (Kulsum, 2023). In addition, there is Gitsaav, who shares insights on gender on his YouTube account, helping many young people, especially millennials and Gen Z, better understand gender and sexuality.

"I used to learn and get new insights about gender from watching Gitasav's channel on YouTube. From there, I understood what gender equality is like, what forms of harassment are, and how we act. In addition, I saw many tweets from X and the Quora forum. So I can teach my student easily to know how important gender equality is" (SK/17/07/2025)

Easy access to the internet and social media can also enable everyone to share and educate one another about gender and sexuality (Martino et al., 2026). The formation of campaigns, volunteers, community building and socialisation both online and offline can be one of the effective and efficient steps in voicing understanding or literacy about the importance of gender and sexuality. The existence of these activities is also expected to be a means and campaign in reducing and eradicating acts of gender inequality and sexual harassment experienced by both men and women.

"We can do socialisation, create campaigns, volunteer, and explain to everyone that gender and sexuality are important to understand. In addition, so that those around victims and us who feel they have been treated like that dare to speak up. Other people can be aware of each other, so they don't get the same thing" (KK/27/06/2025)

3.2 The Phenomenon of male victimization

Men are synonymous with being virile, masculine and strong. Men are also given other privileges such as intelligence, talent, and skills. Although nowadays, women can also be equal to men (Langsæther & Knutsen, 2025). This situation occurs because of social behaviour that always exalts men over women. Men are always considered to be above and beyond women. Men are also characterised as aggressive, independent and brave, while women are characterised as gentle, polite and obedient (Tohirin & Zamahsari, 2021). This is what makes the presence of men demanded to be perfect because men will later become someone who leads both their family and their environment.

"Gender equality is not just like in the same portion, for example, tomorrow men will be priests, women will be the mum. However, that does not mean the priest is always right. There are also times when the priest is wrong." (AN/21/08/2025)

The stereotypes or labelling of men make them feel burdened and shackled by the responsibilities and moral burdens they carry. Men are taught not to cry, not to be whiny, and so on. Because stereotypes or labels about crying are only for women, if men do this, they will be considered weak or the same as women (Sasanti et al., 2022). This leads to men's fear of expressing themselves.

"Some men are moulded by their environment not to cry, to be strong and brave. But men and women are the same. Crying is a form of self-expression, but the environment does not normalise it." (AA/20/10/2025)

The fears experienced by men are the same as those experienced by women. They are both afraid of heights, afraid of being ostracised, afraid of being abandoned, afraid of losing, and so on. It is just that men are moulded continuously to be strong and resilient. This social view of men means that men must be able to solve all the problems that occur to them (Sheikh et al., 2025). If not, the social environment will question his male identity. It is not surprising that men will be more silent and brooding if they have problems than having to tell others (Jufanny & Girsang, 2020). This can trigger the emergence of victimisation in men. Victimisation is a condition or process where a person can become a victim due to various things (Keisha, 2024). Victimisation is a discussion of victimology that explains the process of victimisation. Victimisation is detrimental and painful for victims, both physically, mentally, and materially, which is done by a person or group. Victimisation in men varies. It ranges from physical to verbal sexual harassment.

Victimisation of men by women is usually done by touching parts of the male body (Lovell et al., 2025). Starting from the chest, head, hands, or other parts. Indeed, the sensitive areas or boundaries of men are less clear than those of women. However, most men's sensitive areas are in the thigh because they are close to the vital organs (Fadhillah et al., 2022).

"My female friend likes to tease boys on campus. Indeed, she is odd, so when she has the opportunity, she often pokes and gropes the hands and other areas of her male friends." (OM/10/10/2025)

In contrast to female victimisation, which men often perpetrate. Male victimisation is not only carried out by women on men. However, it can also be done by men. As the case told by one of the informants about victimisation between men

"I have a friend who deliberately teases his male friend. I do not know if he did it, but I think it is already harassment. He and his circle deliberately gave 3 million in front of one of the boys, while saying here is 3 million for you but you have to secure your arse first" (AN/21/08/2025)

The cases described by the two informants prove that male victimisation is more dangerous and pervasive than female victimisation. Male victimisation not only targets adult men but also young children. Data from SIMFONI-PPA, KEMENPPPA (2023) shows that male child victims aged 6-12 years are 30.1% and adolescents aged 13-17 years are 39.2% (Sholehuddin, 2023). Young children are vulnerable to becoming victims of abuse, such as the case that recently occurred in Pondok Aren, South Tangerang, where the biological mother was willing to commit acts of abuse against her toddler child and record her depraved actions (Eben, 2024). The case in Tangerang is also almost the same as what happened in one of the informant's schools when he was teaching.

"When I was still teaching, to be precise, it was only about 3 months. There was one of the teachers who was expelled because he was proven to have abused his male students. The motive was to get good grades. So the story goes that the boy he was targeting was told to come to play badminton on a field that was being renovated. The teacher knew that

there was no CCTV recording because it was being renovated. After playing, he asked the boy who had participated earlier to hug himself. It turns out that the teacher also did this at the school before he taught here. He also often sent photos of his genitals to others and asked children about adult things" (NPH/01/10/2025)

Young children who should be given love but become victims of sexual harassment both from family and close people must have a prolonged effect. One informant explained that from Dr Tirta's YouTube channel, it is explained that most victims of sexual abuse, especially young children, are likely to become perpetrators because the perpetrators used to be victims.

"I often see articles about sexual harassment, and I also often see content from Dr Tirta. He said that the perpetrators of abuse were usually victims too. He has childhood trauma. He is disgusted with himself. That is why, when he grew up, he did that" (SK/17/07/2025)

The impact of victimisation on men is almost the same as that of women. Starting from a sense of trauma, fear, and so on (Fauziah, 2022). Victims of victimisation will also usually feel disgusted with themselves and the perpetrator (Utting, 2025). So that victims should always be assisted to eliminate the trauma of the events that have happened to them, such as going to a psychiatrist or getting closer to God. In contrast to victimisation that occurs to women. Men who experience victimisation are rarely or even unlikely to report the incident. Because they are already familiar with their social environment, male victims will be questioned by the environment about their masculinity. Therefore, assistance for victims of victimisation, especially men, is also essential.

3.3 Forms of online sexual harassment against men and the influence of patriarchal masculinity

Cyberspace is a realm where individuals can easily access and obtain anything they desire with just the touch of a fingertip in a virtual setting (Kirana & Listyani, 2023). It has become an inseparable part of modern human life, offering limitless convenience and interaction. However, the emergence of cyberspace not only brings positive impacts but also introduces various negative consequences for its users (Li et al., 2025). One of the most concerning is cybercrime, a broad category that includes digital-based violence such as sexual harassment, which, as this research reveals, also occurs against men not only in physical environments but increasingly within cyberspace itself. This finding highlights how digital spaces have become extensions of social reality, where gender-based power relations and stereotypes are reproduced in subtle yet harmful ways. As one informant explained,

"Cyberspace comes from two words: 'cyber,' meaning network or internet, and 'space,' meaning area or room. When combined, it refers to a platform that facilitates online interaction, such as social media, e-commerce, websites, and other virtual spaces" (KK/27/06/2025).

Another informant added,

"Cyberspace can simply be understood as a virtual world, a fictional world, a world that is not real" (NPH/01/10/2025).

Despite its virtual nature, the effects of digital interaction are real particularly for those who experience forms of harassment or abuse online (Ramailis, 2020). Cybercrime refers to acts of crime conducted in the virtual environment, ranging from cyberterrorism to cyberbullying. The latter, commonly known as online harassment, is not a new phenomenon, as numerous cyberbullying cases have surfaced on social media platforms. A recent example involves Bertrand Peto, who was harshly criticized by netizens, accused of

being “a rural boy,” and even blamed for the alleged marital breakdown of his adoptive parents, Ruben Onsu and Sarwendah (Rosana, 2024). As one informant succinctly stated,

“Cybercrime means the misuse of cyberspace” (FBA/02/08/2025).

Cyberbullying involves acts of intimidation, humiliation, and verbal abuse carried out through social media with the intent to harm victims psychologically or socially (Riswanto & Marsinun, 2020). According to Dini Marlina, a lecturer in the Digital Neuropsychology Program at the University of Insan Cita Indonesia (UICI), social media accounts for 71% of cyberbullying incidents, followed by 19% through chat applications, 5% in online games, and 1% on YouTube (Muhtar, 2023). The behaviors range from mocking and insulting to more severe forms such as sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is defined as a sexually charged behavior or act directed at another individual that causes harm or discomfort to the victim. Importantly, sexual harassment is not limited to women men can also become victims. The behaviors range from mocking and insulting to more severe forms such as sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is defined as a sexually charged behavior or act directed at another individual that causes harm or discomfort to the victim (Lundgren & Wieslander, 2025). Importantly, sexual harassment is not limited to women men can also become victims. These realities highlight that both online and offline spaces are deeply interconnected in perpetuating harassment. Addressing cyberbullying and sexual harassment requires comprehensive education on gender, sexuality, and digital literacy. Without such efforts, the cycle of harassment whether virtual or physical will continue to affect individuals and communities alike. As one informant explained,

“Sexual harassment against men often happens to young boys, as shown in the movie ‘Siksa Kubur,’ which depicts and discusses this issue” (AN/21/08/2025).

Nevertheless, sexual harassment involving male victims remains underestimated, as society tends to trivialize such incidents or consider them less serious than those involving female victims. In the context of cyberspace, harassment against men often manifests in the form of sexually explicit or objectifying comments. Platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter are rife with such behavior. For instance, Hasan Toys, a rising dangdut singer, has become a frequent target of sexualized commentary during his performances. His videos are flooded with remarks from female users such as “konbrut,” “helicopter style,” “I want to be impregnated,” and other similar phrases. Although these comments are often followed by laughing emojis to suggest humor, they are demeaning and objectifying, reducing the male performer to a sexual object (Rahayu & Legowo, 2022). Similarly, Indonesian footballer Nathan Tjoe-A-On has faced vulgar comments on Twitter, including phrases like “lender,” “wet,” “warm womb,” and other explicit remarks. Interestingly, male users also participate in such behavior, further normalizing this form of online harassment. These incidents demonstrate how patriarchal constructions of masculinity influence perceptions of male victimization (Anisah et al., 2024). Within patriarchal culture, masculinity is associated with power, dominance, and emotional invulnerability (Dochania & Dochania, 2025). Consequently, when men experience sexual harassment, especially at the hands of women, society often refuses to acknowledge it as legitimate victimization. As another informant reflected,

“When women experience harassment, they often cannot fight back. But when men are harassed, people assume they can. Yet, when a woman harasses a man, it actually degrades her own dignity and self-worth” (SK/17/07/2025).

This perception reflects a broader cultural belief that men should always be in control, and that any form of vulnerability threatens their masculine identity. Analyzing this phenomenon through the lens of patriarchal masculinity construction reveals how gender norms continue to shape behavior and interpretation in the digital age. Patriarchy positions

men as dominant and rational beings who should not display weakness or victimhood (Raghavan, 2024). When they do, especially in cases of sexual harassment, their experiences are often dismissed, ridiculed, or reframed as humorous. This dynamic silences male victims, leading to feelings of shame, isolation, and reluctance to report their experiences. In cyberspace, such patriarchal ideals are paradoxically both challenged and reinforced because men's victimization exposes their human vulnerability, yet reinforced because the public response often mocks or trivializes it. Ultimately, cyberspace becomes a reflection of society's ongoing struggle with gender equality and emotional awareness (Multani, 2024).

These realities highlight that both online and offline spaces are deeply interconnected in perpetuating harassment. Addressing cyberbullying and sexual harassment requires comprehensive education on gender, sexuality, and digital literacy. Without such efforts, the cycle of harassment whether virtual or physical will continue to affect individuals and communities alike (Dwivedi et al., 2023). The normalization of sexual harassment against men online underscores the urgent need for greater gender and sexuality literacy, as well as ethical responsibility in digital communication. Tackling this issue demands more than technological regulation; it requires a fundamental cultural transformation that challenges patriarchal notions of masculinity and recognizes that all forms of sexual harassment, irrespective of the victim's gender, are equally real, damaging, and unacceptable. Only through such a holistic approach can society effectively prevent harassment and foster a digital and social environment grounded in respect and equality.

To further situate these findings within a global scholarly debate, it is important to compare the Indonesian context with experiences from other cultural settings. Studies in Western countries, such as the United States and several European nations, have similarly documented the marginalization of male victims of sexual harassment, particularly in digital environments. Research in the United Kingdom and Sweden, for example, indicates that men who experience online sexual harassment often face disbelief and ridicule due to dominant ideals of hegemonic masculinity that associate men with strength, sexual dominance, and emotional control. However, in these contexts, growing public discourse on gender equality and consent has begun to open limited spaces for acknowledging male vulnerability, especially through institutional reporting mechanisms and gender-inclusive policies.

In contrast, studies conducted in East Asian societies, such as Japan and South Korea, reveal a different but related pattern. While male victimization is also underreported, cultural emphases on social harmony, shame, and collective reputation further discourage men from disclosing experiences of sexual harassment, particularly when incidents occur in online spaces where public exposure is amplified. Similarly, research from Middle Eastern and South Asian contexts highlights how deeply rooted patriarchal norms and moral expectations surrounding masculinity intensify stigma against male victims, often framing victimization as a personal failure rather than a social problem. Compared to these contexts, Indonesia demonstrates a hybrid pattern in which global digital culture intersects with local patriarchal values. While social media platforms facilitate transnational forms of interaction and discourse, local constructions of masculinity rooted in cultural, religious, and moral norms continue to shape how male victimization is interpreted and trivialized.

This comparison underscores that although male sexual harassment is a global phenomenon, its social meaning, visibility, and response mechanisms are highly context-dependent (Palo & Nadar, 2026). Therefore, the Indonesian case contributes a critical perspective to global discussions by illustrating how low levels of gender and sexuality literacy, combined with strong patriarchal masculinity norms, exacerbate the silencing of male victims in both offline and digital spaces. By incorporating this comparative perspective, the study demonstrates that addressing sexual harassment against men requires not only local interventions but also engagement with global debates on masculinity, gender literacy, and digital ethics. Such a perspective strengthens the analytical depth of this research and positions it as a meaningful contribution to international discussions on gender-based violence and victimization in the digital age.

The implications of this research underscore the urgent need to strengthen gender and sexuality literacy within digital culture and broader social institutions. To enhance the practical impact of these findings, several targeted recommendations can be proposed. For policymakers, it is essential to develop gender-inclusive regulations and reporting frameworks that explicitly recognize men as potential victims of sexual harassment, both offline and online. National policies on gender-based violence should move beyond binary victim classifications and ensure that legal protections and support services are accessible to all genders. For educational institutions, integrating gender and sexuality literacy into school and university curricula is crucial. Such integration should include critical discussions of masculinity, consent, emotional expression, and digital ethics, enabling students to recognize sexual harassment in all its forms and to challenge stereotypes that portray men as invulnerable. Educators should also be equipped with training and guidelines to respond sensitively to cases involving male victims. For activists and civil society organizations, the development of public awareness campaigns that explicitly highlight male victimization is necessary to counter social stigma and silence. These campaigns should utilize digital platforms to promote inclusive narratives, encourage reporting, and foster empathy toward all victims of sexual harassment. Collaboration with social media influencers and digital communities can further amplify messages that challenge toxic masculinity and normalize conversations about male vulnerability (Cala et al., 2025).

4. Conclusions

This study concludes that sexual harassment against men, particularly in cyberspace, remains a significant yet often overlooked social issue. The findings reveal that patriarchal constructions of masculinity continue to shape public perceptions, leading to the normalization and trivialization of male victimization. As a result, many male victims remain reluctant to disclose their experiences due to fear of stigma, ridicule, and disbelief. Cyberspace reflects and reinforces these gendered expectations, causing online sexual harassment against men to be dismissed as humor rather than recognized as a form of gender-based violence.

Methodologically, this study contributes to the literature by employing an ethnographic approach that connects individual experiences with broader sociocultural structures. Nevertheless, the relatively small number of informants and the focus on the Indonesian digital context limit the broader generalizability of the findings. Future studies may employ quantitative or mixed-method approaches to examine the prevalence, psychological impacts, and intervention strategies related to online sexual harassment against men. Overall, this research advances discussions on gender, masculinity, and digital behavior by highlighting forms of victimization that remain marginalized in both academic and public discourse.

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Author Contribution

A.A.A. contributed to conceptualization, writing of the original draft, and manuscript review and editing. R.M.S. contributed to methodology, investigation, data curation, and formal analysis. M.A.W. contributed to translation, language editing, and manuscript review and editing. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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Ethical review and approval were waived for this study because it involved non-invasive interviews and did not collect sensitive personal or medical data. All participants provided informed consent before the interviews.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in this study. Written consent for participation and publication was also obtained to ensure confidentiality and ethical compliance.

Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy and ethical restrictions.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest

Declaration of Generative AI Use

During the preparation of this work, the authors used ChatGPT (OpenAI) to assist in refining the structure, academic language, and clarity of the manuscript, and Grammarly to check grammar consistency. After using these tools, the authors thoroughly reviewed and edited the content to ensure accuracy and originality, taking full responsibility for the final version of the paper.

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Biographies of Authors

Ajrun 'Azhim Al As'hal, Department of Library and Information Science, Faculty of Interdisciplinary Islamic Studies, Universitas Islam Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta, Special Region of Yogyakarta 55281, Indonesia.

- Email: 23200012015@student.uin-suka.ac.id
- ORCID: N/A
- Web of Science ResearcherID: N/A
- Scopus Author ID: N/A
- Homepage: N/A

Ramadhanita Mustika Sari, Department of Library and Information Science, Faculty of Interdisciplinary Islamic Studies, Universitas Islam Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta, Special Region of Yogyakarta 55281, Indonesia.

- Email: ramadhanita.sari@uin-suka.ac.id
- ORCID: N/A
- Web of Science ResearcherID: N/A
- Scopus Author ID: N/A
- Homepage: N/A

Mega Adjie Wikhda, Department of Library and Information Science, Faculty of Interdisciplinary Islamic Studies, Universitas Islam Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta, Special Region of Yogyakarta 55281, Indonesia.

- Email: 23200012035@student.uin-suka.ac.id
- ORCID: N/A
- Web of Science ResearcherID: N/A
- Scopus Author ID: N/A
- Homepage: N/A