

Salasika

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**North Kalimantan Aisyiyah's Contribution to Empowering Women
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Eugenia Dhea Adeline, Suryaningsi Suryaningsi, Mohammad Bashar

**Understanding Child Sexual Abuse in the Religious Contexts
in Indonesia through a Lived Experience**

Alyssa Putri

**SPPQT Program Evaluation for Food Access and Food Choice
for the Elderly in the SPPQT Empowerment Areas**

Beatrix Finelya, Theresia Pratiwi, Arwyn Weynand Nusawakani

**Indigenisation of Global Norms: Norm Localization Analysis
on LGBTQ+ Acceptance in Surabaya, Indonesia**

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Table of Content

**North Kalimantan Aisyiyah's Contribution to Empowering Women
for the Fulfilment of Political Rights**

Eugenia Dhea Adeline, Suryaningsi Suryaningsi, Mohammad Bashir 1

**Understanding Child Sexual Abuse in the Religious Contexts
in Indonesia through a Lived Experience**

Alyssa Putri 11

**SPPQT Program Evaluation for Food Access and Food Choice
for the Elderly in the SPPQT Empowerment Areas**

Beatrix Finelya, Theresia Pratiwi, Arwyn Weynand Nusawakan 21

**Indigenisation of Global Norms: Norm Localization Analysis
on LGBTQ+ Acceptance in Surabaya, Indonesia**

Chairun Nisya, Dwi Ardhanariswari Sundrijo 33

**Media Campaign Advocacy Supporting Indonesian Lanfu Survivors:
A Postfeminist Perspective**

Kania Bening Rahmayna 51

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Understanding Child Sexual Abuse in the Religious Contexts in Indonesia through a Lived Experience

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ABSTRACT

Child sexual abuse in Indonesia occurs in various settings, including home, school, or work (in places where child labor is common). The National Commission for Child Protection (Komnas Perlindungan Anak) stated that 52% of cases of violence against children from 2020 to mid-2021 were sexual violence (Suminar, 2021).

The increasing number of child abuse cases encourages parents to send their children to religion-based schools that, they think, offer safer environments. Based on the data collected by KOMNAS Perempuan, 19% of sexual violence occurred in Islamic boarding schools or Islamic-based education and 3% in Christian-based education. KPAI also noted that 88% of perpetrators of sexual violence in schools were teachers, mostly religion teachers (13.3%) and physical education teachers (40%), the rest being computer, arts, social studies, Indonesian, or other teachers, while 22% were principals.

The objective of the study is to unravel the experience in a religious setting. The finding narrated that the effects of child sexual abuse could include depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, complex post-traumatic stress disorder, and physical injury to the child, among other problems. In addition, there was no support from the school community for the victim of child abuse.

KEYWORDS: *child sexual abuse, religion, religious conversion, support system*

INTRODUCTION

Recently, Indonesia has been shocked by the increasing number of sexual violence cases. Based on Komnas Perempuan's (The National Commission on Violence Against Women) 2020 CATAHU data, sexual violence cases reached 4,898 cases, including 2,807 interpersonal cases and 2,091 community cases. This number does not include those who did not report to the authorities. In terms of number, there was a decrease compared to the reports in

previous years. However, what might happen is that victims have difficulty accessing services due to government regulations during the pandemic, especially if the perpetrator and victim live in the same place, urging people to stay indoors as much as possible. The space for victims will be more limited, and they will inevitably accept the violence they experience. Not everyone is also proficient in accessing the internet and the media usually used for online help access.

In general, sexual violence is any act of sexual nuance, both physical and verbal, which is carried out against a person without his or her consent or by coercion and manipulation to obtain that consent (NSVRC, 2010). According to WHO (World Health Organization), these actions are carried out to obtain sexual retaliation, personal gain such as trafficking for materials, or acts that attack someone's sexuality, regardless of the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim and where the violence occurred. There are no stereotypes about people who can sexually assault someone. Perpetrators can come from a variety of backgrounds and may be someone the victim knows, such as friends, family members, intimate partners, acquaintances, and strangers. The impact of sexual violence is very significant on the lives of victims and can affect their physical (including sexual and reproductive health) and psychological functions. The consequences that seriously damage the victims' well-being are proof that sexual violence is one of the most insidious forms of crime against humans.

Sexual violence can happen to anyone. There is almost no age limit on who can become a victim of sexual violence. Therefore, child sexual abuse is one form of sexual violence that is rife in Indonesia. According to Arist from the National Commission for Child Protection (Komnas Perlindungan Anak), 52% of cases of violence against children from 2020 to mid-2021 were sexual violence (Suminar, 2021). During the pandemic, Komnas Perempuan's CATAHU (2020) also noted that sexual violence against girls was in

third place, with 954 cases (14%). So, what constitutes child sexual abuse? Forcing a child to engage in sexual activity, showing genitals, showing pornographic content, knowingly seeing or having physical contact with a child's genitals without any specific non-sexual purpose, using a child for personal gain such as making child pornography, trafficking children for sex (Martin et al., 1993), and other activities that make children the object of satisfying sexual needs.

The increasing number of cases of child sexual abuse in Indonesia makes people, especially those who have children or relationships with children, feel worried and wonder what kind of situation is safe for children to carry out their activities. In education, one option that is well-known as an environment that is considered safe for school-age children is religion-based schools. The main reason is that parents want to instill religious knowledge as provisions and foundations so that their children will not misbehave (Askar, Rohmad & Sukarno, 2016). That hope also extends to the school community. Parents believe that the school environment, including teachers and school staff, encourages the formation of children's faith. This, of course, is followed by the expectation that the school will maintain security and will not do or facilitate anything that violates religious ethics (Saputra, 2015).

Lately, the number of sexual violence cases surfaced in religious schools, especially Islamic boarding schools and Islamic schools, has been increasingly troubling not only parents but society as a whole. Based on the data collected by KOMNAS Perempuan, 19% of sexual violence

occurred in Islamic boarding schools or Islamic-based education and 3% in Christian-based education. KPAI also noted that 88% of perpetrators of sexual violence in schools were teachers, mostly religion teachers (13.3%) and physical education teachers (40%), the rest being computer, arts, social studies, Indonesian, or other teachers, while 22% were principals.

One of the most discussed cases is the rape of female students aged 13-17 by the owner of the Madani Boarding School, Bandung, referred to as HW. This incident took place from 2015 to 2021 until it was finally investigated and exposed to the public. Not only rape, but the perpetrator committed a number of other crimes beyond common sense. Rape victims were students at his school, some of whom were underage. HW promised to marry, help take care of the baby, and pay for college fees to become a policewoman. So far, HW has attended six trials for the death penalty and chemical castration. But there has been no verdict.

Another case in a religion-based school occurred in Medan in Galilea Hosana School (GHS) Christian school with alleged harassment by the school principal and pastor, BS. The victims were groped and forced to perform oral sex in his office, house, and hotel. At the urging of a group of parents who held a demonstration outside the school building, the school finally clarified that the perpetrator had been deactivated and would soon be legally processed. The latest update stated that the perpetrator was taken for questioning at the police station.

The cases above are just a few of the many cases of sexual violence both in general and against children that have surfaced recently. Most cases are viral by social media users until they finally get the attention of the wider public and the authorities. Day by day, seeing the news about sexual violence that continues, concerns have grown and doubts about the presence of a truly safe place for children and society as a whole have arisen.

Then, how was the experience of one survivor of child sexual abuse, Genevieve, in her journey to understand what she was going through and towards recovery? Is Genevieve's process substantially the same as in other cases of violence against children in the religious sphere? How did the aspects of Genevieve's "world" help with or hinder her from dealing with the traumatic event?

METHODS

The research employed qualitative methods to go beyond the answers to the causality of the topics used. This research focuses on exploring a phenomenon in detail – looking at the data not broadly, but on what can strengthen the research to increase user involvement. In the process of analysis, qualitative researchers tend to pay attention to meanings that may not have been explicitly revealed. That is, they are interested in how informants understand the world and how they experience these events. The goal is to understand what a person looks like in certain conditions and how people manage themselves in certain situations (Willig, 2013).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Family & Religious Background

Genevieve's family consists of herself, her mother, older sister, and older brother. Genevieve, who is still in college, is the last child. The father is not a person who is close, emotionally and physically distanced, to her because he rarely spends time with Genevieve and his mother who is often called 'her mother'. When Genevieve was 16 years old, her parents decided to divorce.

Genevieve's parents have different religions. Her mother is a Catholic while her father is a Muslim. Genevieve's sister and herself were Muslim. When Genevieve was in junior high school, her older brother decided to convert to Catholicism, followed by her older sister in 2017. It is undeniable that Genevieve felt "left behind" because at that time she had not been allowed to make crucial choices for her life. After waiting for her turn, Genevieve made up her mind to convert as well and at the age of 20, she was finally baptized as an official member of Catholicism— a community where she feels more accepted and comfortable being herself. To this day, Genevieve's father does not know if she converted to Catholicism.

Since childhood, Genevieve and her two older brothers have had a bad perception of Islam. Many of their religious activities were carried out only out of obligation or compulsion. This makes them uncomfortable with their former religion. Apart from being forced to do so, Genevieve found that there are many "disrupted persons" from Islamic religious social institutions

who do not share the same thoughts with her and the values of religion in general.

Her sister thinks that Islam has many rigid, extreme, and unrealistic values, especially in an era that is very advanced and open. Genevieve has the same thoughts as her older sister. At first, she thought of changing religion because she attended a series of his sister's wedding ceremonies. At that time, Genevieve often visited the church and at that time she felt something she had never felt before when she visited the mosque, where she used to worship when she was still a Muslim. She felt like she was getting a "calling". The calling and all the mixed feelings of being in her previous religion finally convinced her to take the first steps to convert.

Another reason, which is no less important, is the experience she had when she was still in elementary school in a Muslim environment. While attending primary school in a predominantly Muslim environment, Genevieve became a victim of sexual violence and rape by her own teacher.

Monumental Bad Events

From her own judgment, Genevieve felt she was a diligent student. In addition to always arriving early, she was also close to the teacher and was the class president during elementary school. When she was in the third grade, her physical education teacher changed several times. Genevieve became quite close to a new physical education teacher (Jajang) and they often exchanged stories. The teacher treated her differently from other students. She was often called and given extra marks. Genevieve

thought it was because they had gotten pretty close and the treatment also made her happy and a little proud. That afternoon, when Genevieve's teacher had been teaching at the school for about two weeks, was the first time the teacher showed bad intentions.

During recess, Genevieve was tasked with submitting assignments to the teacher's room because she was the class president. She met the physical education teacher in the teacher's room, sitting at the computer. Genevieve was alone with the physical education teacher. The teacher called her name, grabbed her hand, and pulled her forcibly closer. Fortunately, one of the teachers or ustad came. It was only then that he released his grip on Genevieve's hand.

A few days after that, Jajang again asked Genevieve to meet him in the teacher's room. Suddenly, he came closer to Genevieve's face and kissed her cheek. Genevieve felt the teacher did that because she was his favorite student and as a form of affection. A few days after that, Genevieve was asked to come again. The teacher began to touch Genevieve's body from the top of her head to her shoulders. It was done every morning until the teacher was brave enough to kiss her cheeks, forehead, and lips, take off Genevieve's veil and shirt to put his hands in, and open her skirt. The perpetrator asked if Genevieve was comfortable with his treatment but she could not answer and just froze. This silence was considered a form of consent by the perpetrator. The longer the time, the more daring the perpetrator became. He stimulated and stuck his finger into Genevieve's intimate part. The perpetrator also forced

Genevieve to do handjobs and blowjobs. Genevieve really did not know what she was doing.

Genevieve's abuse escalated into a rape in the school laboratory in the morning. The perpetrator penetrated her when Genevieve did not even really understand what had happened to her. The perpetrator did not ask if Genevieve felt pain during the first penetration and continued to do so until she had an orgasm. Genevieve clearly remembered that she had difficulty walking because of the pain. In addition, the perpetrators forced her to perform oral sex. Worse, it happened every day, like a routine that could not be avoided.

Genevieve realized she could walk away. Even though she had tried not to obey his teacher's wishes to meet, the perpetrator must have found many ways to cross paths with Genevieve. He kept forcing his way with her. The perpetrator was also the first to know about Genevieve's first period. Despite feeling pain, physically and mentally, Genevieve never complained to anyone. He also threatened to give her bad scores but promised to defend her, care for her, and treat her well in front of her friends if she did what the perpetrator wanted. The treatment made Genevieve feel that she had to obey the perpetrator's wishes even though she experienced walking difficulty and pain when urinating.

The incident continued for three years. Genevieve did not say or do anything to the perpetrator or anyone else. It turned out that her mother had realized that there was something different about Genevieve. Her suspicions were

confirmed when her mother saw sexting from the perpetrator addressed to Genevieve while her mother was holding her cellphone. Finally, the case was reported to the principal, and the perpetrator was investigated. The perpetrator admitted his actions with a penalty of being dismissed from Genevieve school without going to court. Therefore, the perpetrator was not punished for his actions. The school also did not provide any support to Genevieve.

Deconstruction of the Definition of "Damaged Goods"

As a 9-year-old child who attended an Islamic school when Indonesia was still discussing "taboo" things "under the blanket", Genevieve was still veiled by whatever was considered "bad" in her religion. One of the controversial topics to be discussed openly is sexuality. Genevieve knew nothing about it let alone sex. Unfortunately, she experienced an incident that she herself did not understand, sexual abuse by her teacher. He groomed her and finally raped her in her own school. In the context of sexual violence, grooming is a method used by perpetrators to build trust with children as victims and adults around children to get the opportunity to spend time alone with children. In addition to building trust, grooming is also used to desensitize children to inappropriate behavior by the perpetrator. One example of grooming behavior that the perpetrator did to Genevieve was showing excessive interest in her, creating opportunities to be alone with her, and giving her special privileges.

Based on Genevieve's story, she stated that she did not know that his mother would report. When she found out, she was in a panic, shocked, but relieved. She panicked and was shocked because the perpetrators could have hurt her even more. It was a relief because she was sure that if her mother's report was properly responded to by the school, what happened to her would not happen again in the future. This fear stems from the unequal power relations of the teacher. According to Straus (2008), those who are more dominant and hold power will increase violent behavior to maintain their dominant position and continue to get what they want. Therefore, like it or not, Genevieve had to obey. Genevieve was scared, trapped, not free, and insecure.

After Genevieve's mother reported to the principal, the perpetrator was fired without being sentenced to any criminal punishment. She only found out recently, in 2020, that her teacher told her mother directly that Genevieve was raped, so she was "broken" and would not be successful.

According to Yusof et al. (2010), religion provides a framework that acts as a strong influencing factor in shaping people's attitudes towards sexuality. The honor of a woman is directly linked to her purity. As a result, to remain a good woman in Islam, a woman should not put herself in a situation where her purity is questioned. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, in any circumstances, it is not the responsibility that damages the honor or the perpetrator, but the problem of women as victims

(Moore, 2011). Chastity is used as an indicator of success because it is related to honor and self-esteem not only for victims but also for their families, institutions, and the surrounding environment (Khalaf et al., 2018). A rape victim, especially one who is previously known to have never had sexual intercourse, may be viewed by society as "damaged". This phenomenon is known as re-traumatization (Rennison, 2001). Re-traumatization is defined as attitudes, behaviors, and victim-blaming practices by the community, which result in additional trauma for survivors of sexual violence (Campbell & Raja, 2005).

Several years after the incident, after Genevieve became more educated about sexual violence, she still sometimes feels judged by the religious narratives that pass through her social media. Many uploads from Islamic accounts disturb her because there are still many who blame and consider the victim 'bad', damaged goods because they have experienced sexual violence. Genevieve often feels triggered when she hears and sees these narratives. She even hopes that people who say them or make those statements feel what the victims have experienced so that they can understand and not arbitrarily conclude what they feel is true according to the teachings of their religions.

Zero Support

The school, where the incident occurred, did not support Genevieve at all, even with a simple 'are you okay'. She was angry when people from her school gossiped about her

in front of her mom in a group chat. She was more upset when her mother, a mother of a victim of child sexual abuse, had to bear so much burden because of her.

At that time, Genevieve was actually afraid to tell her mother. If her mother did not know about it herself, Genevieve would not tell her. Genevieve had the urge to tell her mother when she felt the pain. However, afraid of being scolded or that her mother scolded the perpetrator, which could backfire on her, she tried to cover up the consequences of the rape she experienced such as walking difficulty and pain in her genitals when urinating. Child victims of sexual violence face complex situations that are difficult for them to fully understand. After her mother had confirmed what had happened to her child, Genevieve had to feel the pain again. She was yelled at and blamed for not telling her mother quickly and for being silent. Subconsciously, based on a sense of panic, her mother did victim blaming. There is a desire to be more understood, feel loved, not blamed, and get official assistance. Even though the school was unable to provide assistance to Genevieve and punish the perpetrators due to inadequate resources, Genevieve preferred that they remained silent and did not sow salt on the wounds she had had by speaking ill of Genevieve and her mother.

Although she was confused because her mother responding in a less embracing way, as she grew up, she understood more why his mother was angry with her. Genevieve knew that the use of a high tone when she was confused and did not know anything was not

the right choice, but she understood that at that time her mother must be in a panic. Compared to herself, she believes her mother was angrier with the perpetrator for abusing her child. However, if it happened now, Genevieve stated that she would not act like she used to. She will not hesitate to report.

Religion as a source of pain and comfort

The sexual violence that Genevieve experienced occurred at an Islamic school, within the school environment, by the teacher who worked there. In addition, no one in the school, from the teachers to the parents, gave Genevieve any support. Not only that, they even added to the wound by judging Genevieve and her mother who did not know anything. It is ironic because many parents today send their children to Islamic schools in the hope that their children's safety is guaranteed and they are protected from immoral acts. Approximately 80% of respondents from parents of students in an Islamic school in Indonesia said that the two needs were expected and fulfilled (Saputra, 2015). According to MORA statistics, in 2017, students in Islamic schools account for about one-fifth of students in public schools. Consequently, it is undeniable that

parents' interest in Islamic schools is still high. In Genevieve case, after the incident, her mother regretted her decision to send Genevieve to an Islamic school.

Now, she manages to find solace in her current religion. During her life as a Catholic, Genevieve has felt comfort. Things that can help Genevieve when she feels emotional are more related to religious activities, such as praying, reading books, and listening to spiritual songs to remind her that God is with her and loves her. These consolations also help her whenever she is triggered by sexual violence-related thoughts.

CONCLUSION

As it turns out, there is no truly safe place to not experience sexual violence, even in a sphere that uses strong moral values. It shows that each individual must be equipped with knowledge about sexual violence and be vigilant, regardless of who they are and how old they are. The people involved are also not necessarily able to understand and empathize with the victim as a support system that helps recovery. Experience as part of one's journey is very likely to be one factor that shapes one's thoughts on religion. It will determine whether a person remains in that religion or not.

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ABOUT

SALASIKA etymologically derived from Javanese language meaning 'brave woman'. SALASIKA JOURNAL (SJ) is founded in July 2019 as an international open access, scholarly, peer-reviewed, interdisciplinary journal publishing theoretically innovative and methodologically diverse research in the fields of gender studies, sexualities and feminism. Our conception of both theory and method is broad and encompassing, and we welcome contributions from scholars around the world.

SJ is inspired by the need to put into visibility the Indonesian and South East Asian women to ensure a dissemination of knowledge to a wider general audience.

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AUDIENCE

SJ aims to provide academic literature which is accessible across disciplines, but also to a wider 'non-academic' audience interested and engaged with social justice, ecofeminism, human rights, policy/advocacy, gender, sexualities, concepts of equality, social change, migration and social mobilisation, inter-religious and international relations and development.

There are other journals which address those topics, but SJ approaches the broad areas of gender, sexuality and feminism in an integrated fashion. It further addresses the issue of international collaboration and inclusion as existing gaps in the area of academic publishing by (a) crossing language boundaries and creating a space for publishing and (b) providing an opportunity for innovative emerging scholars to engage in the academic dialogue with established researchers.

STRUCTURE OF THE JOURNAL

All articles will be preceded by an abstract (150-200 words), keywords, main text introduction, materials and methods, results, discussion; acknowledgments; declaration of interest statement; references; appendices (as appropriate); table(s) with caption(s) (on individual pages); figures; figure captions (as a list); and a contributor biography (150 words). Word length is 4,000-10,000 words, including all previous elements.

TIMELINE AND SCHEDULE

Twice a year: February and July.

PUBLISHING AND COPYRIGHT APPROACH

All articles must not have been published or be under consideration elsewhere. We are unable to pay for permissions to publish pieces whose copyright is not held by the author. Contributors will be responsible for clearing all copyright permissions before submitting translations, illustrations or long quotes. The views expressed in papers are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the journal or its editors.

CONTENT ASSESSMENT

All articles will be peer-reviewed double-blind and will be submitted electronically to the journal (journal@salasika.org). The editors ensure that all submissions are refereed anonymously by two readers in the relevant field. In the event of widely divergent opinion during this process a third referee will be asked to comment, and the decision to publish taken on that recommendation. We expect that the editorial process will take up to four months. We will allow up to four weeks for contributors to send in revised manuscripts with corrections.



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