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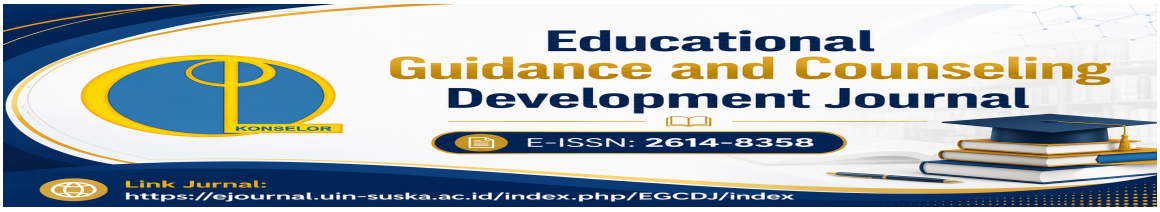

Analysis of Emotional Support for the Prevention of Sexual Harassment in High Schools

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Abstract: Sexual harassment in schools endangers students' right to learn in a safe environment. This study aims to (1) identify key aspects of emotional support for preventing sexual harassment and (2) examine its correlation with students' capacity to respond effectively to such incidents. Using a quantitative correlational approach, the research sampled 304 students from public high schools in Palopo City through quota sampling. Data were gathered via a Likert-scale questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including tests for validity, reliability (α= 0.752), normality, linearity (ANOVA), and Spearman Rank correlation. Results indicate that emotional support from teachers, peers, and the school environment plays a crucial role in enhancing a sense of security and reducing vulnerability to sexual harassment. Although the data were non-normally distributed (Sig. < 0.05), the relationship between variables remained linear. Spearman's correlation yielded a coefficient of 0.493 (Sig. = 0.000), indicating a moderate positive correlation between perceived emotional support and improved prevention of sexual harassment. These findings suggest that schools should implement formal emotional support systems as a primary preventive strategy to empower students' responses.

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INTRODUCTION

Sexual harassment in educational institutions poses a systemic threat to students' fundamental right to a secure learning environment. Globally, gender-based violence affects approximately 246 million students annually (Abdul et al., 2022; WHO, 2020; Wahyudi et al., 2022), a trend mirrored in Indonesia, where the KPAI (2024) report indicates that 12.9% of child rights violations involve sexual violence, primarily targeting adolescents aged 15–17. Persistent exposure correlates with long-term mental health decline, academic

underachievement, and reduced psychological resilience (Rini et al., 2025; Sukmayanti, 2024; Liu, X., et.al., 2025; Ime, Y., et.al. 2025; Lum, C., et.al., 2025).

Despite advancing anti-harassment policies, implementation gaps persist between legal frameworks and school-level efficacy (Marhan et al., 2022; Pearce et al., 2024; Pamulang, 2025; Azhary et al, 2025). Current literature is dominated by evaluations of punitive measures, which often fail to transform school culture and may inadvertently discourage reporting due to fear of social repercussions (Payne et al., 2018; Supryoghi, 2019; Yurika & Nugroho, 2022; Crawford, C., & Burns, R. 2022; Gregory et al., 2024). Thus, this suggests that strict formal regulations alone are insufficient (Fernando, 2020; Maghfiroh, 2020; Octaviani et al., 2021). Unlike prior studies focused on punitive measures (Fahmi et al., 2025; Irsyadul et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2022), this research prioritizes emotional support grounded in social support theory as an understudied psychosocial protective factor (Novianty et al., 2025; Ramadhani et al., 2023).

The primary objective of this study is to address the exclusion of relational factors in current mitigation protocols. This study, conducted amid 11 reported violence cases in Palopo City (early 2025), targets adolescents to: (1) identify the core elements of emotional support within the school environment, and (2) analyze the correlation between perceived emotional support and students' efficacy in adopting preventive behaviors.

METHOD

Research Design

The study was conducted using a quantitative correlational design to examine the relationship between perceived emotional support and sexual harassment prevention efficacy. This design was chosen for its capacity to provide an empirical mapping of how psychosocial variables associate with student behavior in a school context.

Participants and Sampling

The study was conducted in public high schools in Palopo City (SMAN 1–6), targeting a population of 3,636 students (AkuPintar, 2025). A quota sampling technique was employed to select 304 students, ensuring a representative distribution across grades (X, XI, and XII) and gender. Participants were selected based on active enrollment and voluntary consent. While criteria included prior participation in counseling, the study acknowledges potential selection bias inherent in these requirements. To maintain ethical standards, all participants provided informed consent, and data were processed with strict anonymity.

Research Instrument

Data were gathered via a structured Likert-scale questionnaire (1–5) adapted from House's (1981) Social Support Theory. The instrument was divided into two core operational scales: 1) Emotional Support Scale: Measured perceived empathy and care from teachers and peers. 2) Sexual Harassment Prevention Scale: Evaluated students' readiness to recognize, resist, and report inappropriate conduct.

The instrument underwent content validity review by experts and a pilot test with 39 students. The internal consistency was confirmed via Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a good reliability coefficient of 0.752. This index ensures that the items are stable and reliable for measuring the intended constructs.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection was facilitated by school counseling departments in a controlled environment to minimize social desirability bias. Statistical analysis was executed using SPSS in three concise stages: 1) Descriptive Analysis: Summarizing participant demographics and general perception trends. 2) Assumptions Testing: Normality tests (Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk) indicated a non-normal distribution ($p < 0.05$). However, linearity was confirmed, justifying the move to non-parametric testing. 3) Hypothesis Testing: Spearman Rank Correlation was utilized as the primary tool to determine the significance and magnitude of the relationship between emotional support and prevention efficacy.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The empirical analysis involving 304 respondents highlights a striking contrast between the availability of emotional buffers and the students' capacity for proactive prevention. Descriptive statistical processing suggests that the psychosocial support infrastructure within the surveyed schools remains suboptimal, particularly regarding the role of educators.

Table 1. Distribution of Student Perceptions Regarding Emotional Support

Statement	(%)
I feel like my teacher cares about my feelings.	22.4
My friends can understand and listen to me well.	23.7
I feel uneasy because the school environment is uncomfortable.	32.2

These metrics indicate a gap in the school's psychosocial environment. The relatively high percentage of environmental discomfort (32.2%) compared to the low perception of teacher empathy (22.4%) suggests that students perceive the social-relational climate as less supportive than the physical environment. This identifies teacher-student empathy as a specific area requiring institutional improvement.

Table 2. Spearman Rank Correlation

Variable	Correlation Coefficient (ϱ)	Sig. (2-tailed)
Emotional Support Sexual Harassment Prevention	0.493	0.000**

The statistical analysis reveals a significant and positive correlation between the variables ($p = 0.493$, $p < 0.01$). This coefficient indicates a moderate level of association, suggesting that higher perceptions of emotional support are consistently linked with higher levels of student preventive efficacy. Rather than implying direct causation, this result demonstrates that emotional support accounts for a meaningful proportion of the variance in how students respond to harassment risks. Consequently, improvements in the school's affective climate are statistically associated with an enhanced capacity for students to identify and resist potential harassment.

These findings provide an empirical basis for the role of emotional support as a protective factor in the school environment. The correlation analysis suggests that student preventive efficacy is not an independent variable but is significantly associated with the

availability of affective resources. Specifically, the low perception of teacher empathy (22.4%) identified in Table 1 represents a measurable deficit in the school's psychosocial infrastructure. Statistically, this lack of support correlates with lower efficacy in students' ability to establish boundaries or report incidents. This relationship aligns with the 'buffering hypothesis' and House's (1981) theory, which suggest that individuals are less likely to engage in proactive behaviors such as reporting harassment when they perceive a lack of supportive social channels. Furthermore, the moderate-to-low levels of peer solidarity indicate that the social climate is not yet optimized to support bystander intervention. Consequently, the data suggests that strengthening interpersonal trust and emotional accessibility is a necessary empirical complement to existing formal anti-harassment regulations.

DISCUSSION

The primary objective of this inquiry was to explore the intricate nexus between students' perceived emotional support and their efficacy in preventing sexual harassment within the high school environment. Amidst a global rise in school-based violence, this study asserts that institutional safety cannot be guaranteed solely through rigid surveillance or legalistic frameworks. Instead, the research emphasizes the significant factor of psychosocial factors. The significance of this study lies in its shift from the traditional "punitive-reactive" model toward a "psychosocial-preventive" paradigm. By positioning emotional support as a fundamental pillar of school counseling, this research provides a timely intervention for educational policy in Indonesia, particularly in responding to the documented cases of harassment in Palopo City.

The empirical analysis consistently validates the core research hypothesis. The statistical output, characterized by a Spearman Rank correlation coefficient of 0.493, confirms that emotional support is a robust predictor of students' preventive behaviors. This significant, moderate-positive correlation illustrates that when students perceive a high degree of empathy and validation from their social ecosystem, they develop a heightened capacity to recognize, resist, and report inappropriate conduct. This finding directly satisfies the research objective by demonstrating that prevention is not merely an act of knowing the rules, but a psychological manifestation of feeling secure within one's community.

The results of this study harmonize with the "buffering hypothesis" found in House's (1981) Social Support Theory, which suggests that emotional backing serves as a protective factor against environmental stressors. These findings are congruent with the work of Skoog & Kapetanovic, (2021), who identified relational support as the primary cornerstone of adolescent psychological health. However, this study adds a localized nuance that diverges from Ardiansyah et al., (2023). While previous Indonesian scholarship emphasized legal literacy, our data suggests that legal knowledge remains inert without emotional safety. This aligns with the insights of Wang et al., 2022; Lu, G., et. al., 2022; Madsgaard, A., et. al., 2022), reinforcing the idea that social support is the decisive variable determining whether a student moves from passive silence to active disclosure.

An unexpected and highly concerning revelation in this study was the critically low perception of teacher responsiveness, recorded at 22.4%. In the cultural context of Indonesia, where teachers are traditionally viewed as "surrogate parents" (*in loco parentis*), this deficit represents a significant institutional anomaly. A plausible explanation for this finding may be the "bureaucratic formality" and "professional distance" that often characterizes modern teaching. Educators may be disproportionately focused on administrative compliance and curriculum delivery, thereby neglecting the "affective labor" determinant for student safety. This lack of appraisal support explains why a significant portion of respondents (32.2%)

reported environmental discomfort; they perceive the school as an academic site, but not as an supportive environment.

The implications of this study are profound for both theory and practice. Theoretically, it offers an integrated model bridging educational psychology and child protection, positing that harassment prevention is a communal psychosocial process rather than a solitary legal duty. Practically, these findings serve as a empirical evidence suggests for school administrators to reform their bimbingan konseling (guidance and counseling) protocols. Prevention strategies must transcend symbolic gestures, such as warning banners, and focus on "relational training" for educators. Enhancing teacher empathy is not a "soft skill" but a strategic necessity to ensure that predators cannot operate in the shadows of student fear and isolation.

Despite its rigorous execution, this research acknowledges specific limitations. The reliance on self-reported questionnaires may introduce social desirability bias, where students may hesitate to disclose sensitive experiences fully. Additionally, the cross-sectional design offers a "snapshot" of the current situation but cannot definitively track the longitudinal evolution of preventive abilities.

Future research should adopt a longitudinal approach to observe how emotional support interventions influence school safety over several academic cycles. Furthermore, qualitative explorations, such as in-depth interviews with teachers and counselors, are needed to uncover the systemic barriers to providing emotional support. Lastly, comparative studies between public schools and religious-based institutions (Pesantren) would yield deeper insights into how different cultural hierarchies influence the efficacy of psychosocial prevention strategies.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that emotional support within educational settings serves as a critical predictor of sexual harassment prevention efficacy among adolescents. Empirical evidence reveals a significant, moderate positive correlation ($p = 0.493$, $p < 0.001$), confirming that strengthening affective perceptions directly enhances a student's capacity to recognize, resist, and report harassment. These findings validate the "buffering hypothesis" within House's (1981) theory, positioning emotional support as a psychological anchor that neutralizes environmental stressors and fosters proactive protective behaviors.

However, a critical discrepancy exists between formal regulations and the actual psychosocial climate of schools. The low perception of teacher empathy (22.4%) alongside high levels of environmental discomfort (32.2%) indicates a deficit in the school's affective infrastructure. This suggests that anti-harassment policies cannot achieve maximum efficacy if they rely solely on legalistic or punitive measures without reinforcing interpersonal relationships. Consequently, educational institutions must reform guidance and counseling protocols by integrating "affective labor" as a fundamental preventive strategy. Cultivating educator empathy and peer solidarity is a strategic necessity for building learning spaces that are both safe and dignified.

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