

Constructing Social Sanctions as a Preventive Strategy Against Sexual Violence in Indonesian Higher Education: A Mixed-Methods Study

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Abstract. Sexual violence in higher education is a deeply rooted structural issue inadequately addressed solely through legal measures. This study investigates how members of an academic community construct their understanding of social sanctions as preventive tools against sexual violence on campus. Conducted at Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar, the research employs a sequential explanatory mixed-method design, initially involving qualitative interviews with students, faculty, and institutional leaders. Subsequently, a quantitative survey was administered based on themes identified from the qualitative phase. Results indicate a broad consensus that social sanctions serve as effective normative controls, provided they are implemented consistently, fairly, and with community legitimacy. Quantitative analysis further confirms a significant relationship between perceptions of consistent sanction application by faculty and university leaders and the acceptance of social sanctions among the campus population. The study highlights the critical roles of institutional support, ethical education, and active community participation in fostering effective and sustainable violence prevention strategies. Practical recommendations emphasize integrating value-driven curricula and enhancing community involvement to build a socially responsive and equitable institutional environment.

Keywords: *Sexual Violence, Social Sanctions, Higher Education, Substantive Justice, Community Engagement*

INTRODUCTION

Introduction Sexual violence within higher education institutions represents a complex global issue shaped by cultural, structural, and institutional factors. Ideally considered safe spaces for intellectual and personal development, campuses frequently become sites of gender-based violence, often underreported due to stigma, social barriers, and power imbalances between perpetrators and victims (Banyard et al., 2022; Edwards et al., 2023; Waterman et al., 2022). The situation is worsened by limited awareness among campus stakeholders regarding the complexities and preventive mechanisms surrounding sexual violence (Almanssori, 2023; Wahid et al., 2023).

Recent literature indicates that effective prevention must transcend legalistic and administrative interventions, necessitating active involvement from students, faculty, and

institutional leadership to establish values and norms explicitly rejecting violence (Graham et al., 2024; Kaufman et al., 2022; McMahon et al., 2020). Central to this prevention is understanding how knowledge about sexual violence and informal preventive mechanisms, particularly social sanctions, is socially constructed and enacted within campus communities (Bloom et al., 2022; Munro-Kramer et al., 2020; Rieger et al., 2023).

A critical challenge lies in the widespread lack of literacy on sexual violence, limited understanding of reporting mechanisms, and pervasive distrust in institutional responses, which perpetuate permissive attitudes toward perpetrators (Carlyle et al., 2022; Chugani et al., 2021; Wahidin & Nova, 2023). Existing formal regulatory frameworks have been insufficient in dismantling deeply entrenched cultural barriers such as the "culture of silence" and prevailing gender-based power dynamics within academia (Toyibah & Riyani, 2025).

Community-based social strategies, including social sanctions—expressed as collective pressures against perpetrators—have been proposed as effective complementary approaches to legal measures. The perceived legitimacy and fairness of these sanctions significantly influence their acceptance and effectiveness as preventive tools (Banyard et al., 2020; Hanson-Defusco, 2024; Logie et al., 2023). Thus, it is essential to investigate how social interactions and collective communication shape knowledge and perceptions of these informal mechanisms among campus actors (Coulter et al., 2024; Ngabito et al., 2024).

Utilizing a mixed-method approach, this study aims to explore in depth how academic stakeholders at Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar construct and interpret the role of social sanctions in preventing campus sexual violence. The research uniquely integrates qualitative and quantitative methodologies to offer a comprehensive understanding of the sociocultural dimensions of informal prevention practices, filling a notable gap within existing literature predominantly focused on formal mechanisms (Bellocchi, 2022; Liu et al., 2022; Rahmian & Hod, 2021; Silva Guimarães, 2022).

The study specifically targets three central groups within the university context: students as potential change agents and vulnerable populations, faculty members as moral guides and educators, and university leaders as role models and policymakers. By doing so, it contributes empirically to the international discourse on value-driven, community-based strategies for preventing sexual violence, particularly within the contextually rich yet under-examined setting of Indonesian higher education (Imania & Santoso, 2024; Ngabito et al., 2024; Wahidin & Nova, 2023).

The understanding of sexual violence within higher education institutions emerges from complex social dynamics, public discourse, and interpersonal experiences embedded in campus

life. Numerous studies highlight the significance of constructivist perspectives in explaining how perceptions of sexual violence develop through social interactions, experiential learning, and community engagement (He & Lu, 2024; Liu et al., 2022; Suartama et al., 2024). Educational methodologies such as project-based learning, group discussions, and collaborative pedagogies have been identified as crucial avenues for raising collective awareness and preventing sexual violence (Aylk, 2023; Duangjinda et al., 2021; Zabolotna et al., 2021).

Within higher education contexts, research identifies significant barriers that hinder the creation of safe and inclusive environments, such as inadequate leadership engagement, limited gender literacy, and deeply entrenched power imbalances (Jiang & Zhang, 2023; Ngabito et al., 2024; Silva Guimarães, 2022). It is also critical to understand how formal and informal knowledge structures intersect—such as policies, curricula, social media, and institutional culture—to shape attitudes toward sexual violence (Cai et al., 2022; Gong et al., 2025; Tanjung et al., 2021).

The advent of digital technology further complicates these dynamics by introducing new avenues for collaborative knowledge construction through online learning platforms and mobile technologies. These platforms have shown promise in promoting awareness of gender-based violence, but significant challenges remain, including disparities in digital access and literacy and the ability of facilitators to sensitively manage these spaces (Gao et al., 2020; Rahmian & Hod, 2021; Xu & Dai, 2024).

Scholars advocate for strengthening social ethics education through semiotic approaches, critical reflection, and the cultivation of participatory identities in violence prevention strategies (Aalto & Mustonen, 2022; Frank et al., 2022; He, 2024). Nevertheless, these methods often fail to adequately capture the distinctive cultural and institutional characteristics of higher education in contexts such as Indonesia, as existing research predominantly focuses on contexts from the Global North (Glaés-Coutts & Nilsson, 2021; Onwuegbuchulam, 2023; Zambrano & Arteaga, 2024).

A critical gap in the existing literature is the lack of explicit exploration into how social sanctions are collectively constructed and perceived by students, faculty, and institutional leaders in Indonesian university settings. Moreover, the predominance of quantitative methods has limited insights into the deeper, subjective, and narrative dimensions of sexual violence prevention efforts. Therefore, adopting a mixed-method approach grounded in social constructionist theory is necessary to bridge these complexities (Bellocchi, 2022; Johri et al., 2022; Rivera et al., 2025).

This research addresses these gaps by conducting an interdisciplinary inquiry into how social sanctions as preventive mechanisms against sexual violence are perceived, constructed, and

reinforced within the Indonesian university environment. By integrating narrative and statistical data, the study offers a comprehensive perspective on local cultural, religious, and hierarchical influences shaping collective attitudes toward violence prevention.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design and Approach This study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-method design. Initially, qualitative methods were used to explore how members of the academic community at Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar conceptualize social sanctions as a preventive measure against sexual violence. The qualitative findings then guided the quantitative phase, which aimed to verify and generalize these insights through non-parametric correlation analysis. This mixed-method approach effectively combines narrative depth from qualitative exploration with quantitative rigor, enhancing the robustness and contextual validity of the research findings (Bellocchi, 2022; Disch et al., 2024; Rivera et al., 2025).

Population, Sampling, and Data Collection Techniques The population for this study included all academic constituents at Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar, with specific emphasis on students, faculty members, and university leaders. Qualitative data were collected using purposive sampling, ensuring diverse representation based on experience and institutional roles. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to deeply explore participants' perceptions and understandings of social sanctions. These methods align with participatory learning and community-based value formation approaches (Jiang & Zhang, 2023; Nguyen & Diederich, 2023; Zhang et al., 2022).

Quantitative data were gathered using a structured questionnaire with a four-point Likert scale, developed directly from qualitative thematic analyses. To ensure broad and proportional representation among the target groups, stratified random sampling was implemented in the survey distribution phase (Pérez et al., 2024; Wang & Zhang, 2024; Zabolotna et al., 2021).

Instruments, Validation, and Analytical Procedures The qualitative interview protocol was designed based on a knowledge-experience interaction framework commonly used in collaborative learning research (Chiu & Ho, 2024; Fateh et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2022). Content validity was established through expert reviews by professionals specializing in social education and gender studies. Data from interviews underwent thematic coding, proceeding systematically from open to axial and selective coding, ensuring comprehensive analysis of the narratives (Frank et al., 2022; Rahmian & Hod, 2021; Suartama et al., 2024).

For quantitative data analysis, Spearman correlation was employed to explore relationships between perceptions of social sanctions across the campus community. The choice of Spearman

correlation was suitable due to the ordinal nature of the data and its non-normal distribution, in alignment with best practices for educational research (Sun et al., 2021; Wen, 2022; Wu & Ko, 2024).

RESULT

Research Ethics and Triangulation Validity Ethical considerations were meticulously observed throughout the research process, including informed consent, confidentiality, and respondents' right to withdraw. The credibility and reliability of results were enhanced through methodological triangulation, combining multiple sources of data, diverse data collection methods, and robust analytical procedures. This triangulation is particularly valuable in sensitive topics like sexual violence, effectively minimizing biases and strengthening interpretive accuracy (Alvarez et al., 2021; Fang et al., 2022; Goli & Dastmalchi, 2024). Overall, this methodological framework is not only rigorous but contextually sensitive and participatory, providing valuable insights that support the development of effective, community-driven policies and practices for addressing sexual violence in higher education.

The findings of this study, derived from both qualitative exploration and quantitative validation, illustrate how the academic community at Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar conceptualizes social sanctions as a preventive strategy against sexual violence. Qualitative analysis revealed a consensus among students, faculty, and university leaders that social sanctions serve not merely as punitive measures but as moral obligations rooted in collective trust and ethical legitimacy (He & Lu, 2024; Rahmian & Hod, 2021; Silva Guimarães, 2022).

The thematic analysis produced four primary categories:

1. Perception of sanctions as a just preventive measure: Participants emphasized fairness and ethical grounding as key determinants of sanction effectiveness.
2. Resistance to legal formalism: There was widespread agreement that purely legalistic approaches were insufficient and needed to be supplemented by informal, community-based strategies.
3. The exemplary role of leadership and campus culture: Effective prevention was closely linked to the visible and consistent actions of university leaders and faculty members.
4. Limited literacy regarding sexual violence: Participants identified significant gaps in understanding the nuances of sexual violence, particularly among newer students.

These themes align closely with social constructionist theory, underscoring that collective perceptions formed through continuous interpersonal interactions significantly influence preventive behaviors (Bellocchi, 2022; Rivera et al., 2025; Tissenbaum & Joye, 2023).

Table 1. Spearman’s Correlation Coefficients

Variable	SSS	SSL (Lecturers)	SSL (Leaders)
Social Sanctions for Students (SSS)	—	0.778 (p < .001)	0.721 (p < .001)
Social Sanctions for Lecturers (SSL)	0.778 (p < .001)	—	0.883 (p < .001)
Social Sanctions for Leaders (SSL)	0.721 (p < .001)	0.883 (p < .001)	—

Quantitative data reinforced qualitative findings, highlighting significant correlations between perceptions of sanctions imposed by lecturers and university leaders and students' acceptance of social sanctions. The strongest correlation was observed between sanctions imposed on lecturers and leaders ($\rho = 0.883$), signifying the influential role institutional figures play in shaping preventive attitudes. Additionally, correlations between student perceptions of lecturer sanctions ($\rho = 0.778$) and leader sanctions ($\rho = 0.721$) further underline the importance of fairness and consistency in these preventive mechanisms (Cai et al., 2022; Fang et al., 2022; Li et al., 2021).

Overall, these findings underscore social sanctions as more than normative enforcements; they represent collective participation and shared commitment toward fostering a safe campus environment. These results corroborate existing literature emphasizing the crucial role of consistent community responses to normative violations (Chiu & Ho, 2024; Hao et al., 2021; Zabolotna et al., 2021).

However, the research also identified significant literacy gaps about sexual violence, particularly among first-year students unfamiliar with campus ethical discourses. This indicates an urgent need for educational initiatives, specifically values-based curricula, aimed at improving comprehensive social ethics literacy throughout higher education (Liu et al., 2022; Suartama et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2025).

In summary, the study provides robust empirical evidence highlighting the potential of community-based interventions and social sanctions to sustainably prevent sexual violence through enhanced collective engagement and ethical norm construction.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study illustrate that social sanctions within the higher education context transcend their punitive function and instead embody collective moral responsibility and authority in preventing sexual violence. This perspective aligns with social constructivist theories, which propose that knowledge and behaviors emerge from ongoing symbolic interactions and community-driven reinforcement of norms (Liu et al., 2022; Suartama et al., 2024; Sun et al., 2021). Crucially, the legitimacy, fairness, and consistent application of social sanctions by

institutional authorities significantly influence their acceptance and effectiveness within the academic community (Fang et al., 2022; Jiang & Zhang, 2023; Rivera et al., 2025).

The study emphasizes a robust relationship between how social sanctions are perceived and the community's willingness to support them. This supports theories emphasizing collective meaning-making, asserting that effective preventive actions rely on shared communal understanding and agreement (Bellocchi, 2022; Castellanos Ramírez, 2023; Tissenbaum & Joye, 2023). Trust in procedural justice and fairness within institutional practices emerged as vital for enhancing normative compliance, facilitated through informal, community-based interactions such as classroom dialogues, peer discussions, and social media engagement (Fu et al., 2024; Nguyen & Diederich, 2023).

A critical issue identified by this research is the substantial gap in sexual violence literacy, particularly among newer university entrants. This finding resonates with previous studies, which also highlight deficiencies in student understanding regarding the nuances of sexual violence, reporting protocols, and available support systems despite existing formal frameworks (Chiu & Ho, 2024; Feng et al., 2025; Wu & Ko, 2024). Addressing this literacy gap through comprehensive curricula that integrate social ethics, gender education, and human rights from the outset of university life is urgently recommended (Aylk, 2023; Ha, 2022; Lee, 2023).

Additionally, the study underscores the necessity of structural support from higher education institutions, emphasizing leadership by example and a visible commitment to anti-violence cultures. Such leadership is crucial in fostering a community-wide ethos of zero tolerance towards perpetrators of sexual violence (Cao, 2021; Gong et al., 2025; Silva Guimarães, 2022). The inclusive and adaptive nature of community-based approaches proves particularly effective in addressing diverse and complex campus dynamics (Frank et al., 2022; Pan, 2022; Zabolotna et al., 2023).

Another significant contribution of this research is its validation of participatory strategies in shaping community perceptions of sexual violence. Previous studies have similarly demonstrated that student engagement in forums, awareness campaigns, and bystander training significantly enhances proactive attitudes toward violence prevention (Banyard et al., 2022; Bloom et al., 2022; Potter et al., 2021). Therefore, institutional strategies that exclusively depend on administrative policies, devoid of active community participation, risk superficial and unsustainable outcomes.

Moreover, the strategic deployment of digital platforms and online education emerges as a valuable tool for extending reach and deepening understanding of sexual violence prevention. Nevertheless, the study emphasizes that technological initiatives must account for cultural

sensitivities and accessibility issues, ensuring students possess adequate digital literacy (Duangjinda et al., 2021; Huang et al., 2024; Yusof et al., 2022).

In conclusion, the findings advocate for a comprehensive, community-based approach to prevent sexual violence in higher education settings. Success depends heavily on clearly communicated shared values, consistent institutional support, and active engagement of all stakeholders in cultivating a resilient culture of zero tolerance for sexual violence (Bellocchi, 2022; Disch et al., 2024; Floren et al., 2021).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the construction and implementation of social sanctions as preventive measures against sexual violence on university campuses are inherently collective and participatory processes, deeply shaped by community perceptions of justice and institutional legitimacy. The findings highlight that social sanctions gain effectiveness not simply as informal punitive mechanisms but as ethical and educational tools that reinforce normative community values and responsibilities. The consistent and fair application of these sanctions by university leaders and faculty members is crucial in fostering a culture of zero tolerance for sexual violence, particularly within the socially and culturally nuanced context of Indonesian higher education.

The research underscores several practical implications, notably the imperative to integrate comprehensive sexual violence education and ethical literacy into university curricula. This educational integration should aim to cultivate robust moral leadership and actively involve students in creating and sustaining a safe and equitable academic environment. The mixed-methods approach utilized in this study effectively captures the complexity of social perceptions and meanings attributed to violence prevention efforts, suggesting its applicability across various institutional and cultural settings.

Future research should consider applying this methodological framework to broader contexts, both within Indonesia and internationally, to enhance the generalizability of findings and explore further factors influencing effective violence prevention. Additionally, adopting interdisciplinary perspectives—from gender studies, communication, and educational research—will be critical in developing sustainable, equitable, and community-driven strategies to combat sexual violence in higher education globally.

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