

Psychological Assistance for Children Victimized by Sexual Violence: Strengthening Their Psychological Resilience

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Abstract: This study aims to describe the psychological assistance process provided by the UPTD PPA of Surabaya City to child victims of sexual violence. The research used a descriptive qualitative method, with data collected through in-depth interviews, direct observations, and documentation. The findings indicate that psychological assistance at UPTD PPA Surabaya involves not only counseling but also support during medical procedures, legal processes, and temporary shelter placement. However, several challenges arise in the implementation, including the child's difficulty in disclosing the incident, limited communication abilities among young children, lack of early sexual education, and insufficient support from the social environment and families. Therefore, the active involvement of families and communities is crucial to the psychological recovery of child victims of sexual violence.

Keywords: Sexual Violence, Children, Psychological Assistance

1 INTRODUCTION

Sexual violence is a crime against human rights that seriously impacts victims physically, psychologically, and socially. According to the law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 12 of 2022, types of sexual violence include sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, forced contraception, rape, forced marriage, sexual slavery, and sexual torture. Cases of sexual violence do not only affect adults. However, this often happens to children. Data from the Online Information for the Protection of Women and Children (SIMFONI-PPA) record 28,831 cases of violence against children in Indonesia in 2024, with sexual violence being the most reported category (KemenPPPA, 2024). Based on official data collected through the Gender and Child Information System (SIGA) of the Ministry of Woman's Empowerment and Child Protection (KemenPPPA), cases of sexual violence against children remain a serious issue in East Java Province. In 2024, there were 742 reported cases of sexual violence against children. More specifically, in Surabaya City, there were 115 reported cases in the same year (KemenPPPA, 2024). This situation demonstrates that children remain a vulnerable group in urgent need of special protection. Sexual violence against children has the potential to cause severe psychology impacts. A study by Samodra and Paramastri (2019) found that victims often experience disturbances in psychosexual development, deep psychological trauma, and difficulties in building trust and interpersonal relationships in adulthood. Similarly, Zuliani et al. (2023) reported trauma symptoms among child victims of sexual violence, including nightmares, social avoidance, and hyperarousal, all of which can disturb social interaction and emotional well-being.

In handling cases of sexual violence against children, there is a government service institution that has an important role in providing assistance to victims of violence, including child victims of sexual violence, called the "*Unit Pelaksanaan Teknis Perlindungan Perempuan dan Anak*" (UPTD PPA) in Surabaya. In practice, the UPTD PPA in Surabaya not only provides legal and medical assistance, but also psychological assistance through counselors. Previous studies have also highlighted the significant role of UPTD PPA in supporting victims' recovery. Research by Afifah et al. (2024) in Jember Regency found that the integrated approach of UPTD PPA, which includes psychological, legal, and social services, was effective in improving access to service for victims. Therefore, this study seeks to gain a deeper understanding of how psychological assistance is carried out by counselors at UPTD PPA in Surabaya for children who are victims of sexual violence as a form of intervention to support their psychological recovery. The results of this analysis will be discussed in more depth by relating them to relevant theories.

2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research method and was conducted at the *Unit Pelaksanaan Teknis Daerah Perlindungan Perempuan dan Anak* (UPTD PPA) in Surabaya. The focus of the research was on cases of sexual violence against children handled by the institution during the research period. The participants consisted of five individuals. A detailed profile of each participant is presented in the table below to provide clarity of data.

Table 1. Profile of participants

No	Participant	Role/Status
1	Client AN	Child Victim
2	Client PT	Child Victim
3	Client IT	Child Victim
4	SB	UPTD PPA Staff (Psychological Counselor)
5	BB	UPTD PPA Staff (Psychological Counselor)

Data collection was carried out through observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted directly during case handling, including the initial assessment process, interactions between counselors and clients, and client dynamics during counseling sessions. Semi structured interviews were conducted with three clients and two staff members to explore their experiences in case handling and the psychological support provided. Documentation included records of the number and types of cases handled, chronological notes of clients' cases, and administrative reports relevance to the case handling process

From an ethical standpoint, the researcher ensured that the entire process adhered to research ethics by obtaining informed consent from all participants. For child participants, consent was obtained from their parents or guardians, while staff members provided consent directly before the interview. Confidentiality of data was maintained, and all participants' identities were anonymized to protect their privacy

3 RESULTS

1. Overview of Sexual Violence Case Handled by UPTD PPA Surabaya

The phenomenon of violence against children remains a serious issue, as it occurs repeatedly from year to year and tends to show an increasing trend. This situation requires serious intervention from authorized institutions, one of which is UPTD PPA, which plays a crucial role in providing protection and assistance service for children in Surabaya. Based on interview with the UPTD PPA Surabaya team, the rising number of reported cases of children sexual violence is influenced by several factor. First, there has been a growing awareness within society in responding to violence. This awareness arises not only from the victims themselves but also from those around them. Communities that are more sensitive to incidents of violence in their surroundings tend to report and respond to cases more quickly. Environmental factors also play a significant role. The environment in which a child grows up greatly influences their behavior and experiences. An unhealthy environment with minimal supervision increases the risk of a child becoming a victim of violence. Second, advancements in technology and access to information. The growing accessibility of technology has made it easier for the public to report cases. Reporting is no longer limited to direct visits to the UPTD PPA office; it can now also be done through social media or the agency's official contact numbers. This facilitates access for victims or families who may have difficulties reaching the office in person.

During the research period, the author participated directly in the assistance process for several sexual violence cases handled by UPTD PPA Surabaya. The cases that were successfully accompanied include:

- 1) Case 1: Sexual violence in orphanage setting
The victim, identified by initials PT, experienced sexual violence by a caregiver at an orphanage. UPTD PPA in Surabaya provided comprehensive assistance from the initial stages, including outreach and apprehension of the perpetrator, to psychological assistance through counseling to explore the chronology of events. The victim was also accompanied during medical examinations, supported throughout the legal process, and temporarily placed in a children's shelter for protection.
- 2) Case 2: Sexual violence by biological father
The victim, identified by initials AN, a 7-year-old child, became a victim of sexual violence by her biological father. The victim received intensive psychological assistance services, both during medical examinations at the hospital and throughout the legal process. Temporarily, the victim was also secured in a safe house to ensure her safety during the ongoing legal proceedings.
- 3) Case 3: Sexual abuse by neighbor

The victim, identified by initials IT, a 9-year-old child, experienced sexual abuse by a neighbor who was an elderly toy seller. The perpetrator was well-known to the victim and frequently visited, as the victim's parents often left their child in the perpetrator's care while working. In this case, the victim received psychological assistance, including treatment by a psychologist from UPTD PPA in Surabaya.

2. The Process of Assistance for Child Sexual Violence Case

a) Service Flow and Complaint Procedures

The reporting and complaint stage represents the initial step taken by violence victims. Reports can be submitted directly by visiting the UPTD PPA Surabaya office, through hotline services, or through referrals from related institutions. Every report received, whether directly or indirectly, is followed up through an initial assessment process. The purpose is to obtain complete and relevant information so that case handling can be conducted appropriately. Therefore, when victims or reporters come to UPTD PPA, a comprehensive assessment is conducted to understand the problems experienced by the victim. The same approach is applied to reporters who contact through the hotline; they are asked to provide information related to the case and agree on a schedule for conducting face-to-face assessment at the UPTD PPA office.

When case handling requires the involvement of other parties, such as police, referral hospitals, or psychologists, UPTD PPA establishes cross-sector coordination to support comprehensive handling processes. After case identification is completed, the report document is submitted to the assistance coordinator to determine the appropriate officer to handle the case. The designated assistant then establishes coordination with other professional teams such as police, medical personnel, psychologists, and legal officials including prosecutors and courts. In child sexual violence cases, reporters generally come from parents or guardians who have close relationships with the victim. Most clients who come to the UPTD PPA Surabaya office are also accompanied by their parents or guardians during the reporting and assistance process. The types of sexual violence reports frequently handled by counselors from UPTD PPA Surabaya include rape, sexual abuse, and sodomy.

b) Assessment stage

After reports are received by the assistance team, the assessment stage is continued to determine the needs and follow-up actions required to process the case. The UPTD PPA assistance team approaches the victim with the purpose of determining what services and follow-up actions are needed by the victim, whether the victim requires legal services, psychological services, or needs all of these services as explained by the UPTD PPA in Surabaya assistance coordinator.

In the assessment process, counselors or assistants require communication skills when approaching clients. At this stage, assistants conduct psychological assessments with a relaxed approach, such as building client trust in the counselor, creating a sense of safety, and exploring the chronology of events from the child's perspective. This stage is crucial because many victims feel ashamed or afraid to tell their story, especially since perpetrators are usually people they know or are even close to.

c) Psychological treatment and assistance

Child sexual violence cases have serious impacts on the victim's psychological condition. Therefore, appropriate psychological treatment is needed to help children overcome fear and trauma that arise from such incidents. The fear and trauma experienced by each child varies, depending on the characteristics of the case experienced and the child's ability to respond to the incident. In this regard, psychological treatment should be conducted by professional staff such as counselors or psychologists, so that the interventions provided can help reduce psychological burden and facilitate the trauma recovery process effectively. This treatment usually begins with initial counseling, which is conducted when the child or their guardian first comes to the UPTD PPA Surabaya office to file a complaint. At this stage, the assistance team conducts an initial assessment to understand the child's psychological condition and the context of the reported case. Subsequently, if needed, the child will be referred for further counseling aimed at exploring more deeply the victim's psychological condition, the traumatic experiences they have undergone, and their long-term recovery needs.

In handling sexual violence cases, particularly against children, UPTD PPA Surabaya provides various forms of assistance tailored to each victim's needs. This assistance aims to provide a sense of safety, strengthen the victim's psychological condition, and ensure comprehensive recovery. One form of assistance available is temporary shelter, which is provided for female child victims of violence as well as children in conflict with the law. This safe house functions as temporary protection, especially if the child's living environment is considered unsafe or does not support their psychological recovery

process. By staying temporarily in the safe house, children can be more easily monitored by officers, both in terms of safety and psychological development. Children placed in shelters first undergo psychological examination. Furthermore, while in the safe house, the child's condition is continuously monitored regularly. If during the monitoring process any symptoms or abnormal psychological changes are found, the child will be facilitated to undergo further psychological examination to ensure appropriate intervention needs. Assistance also includes mediation services. Mediation is conducted involving all parties involved in the case, including perpetrators, victim's family, and assistants from UPTD PPA, while prioritizing the best interests of the child. This mediation process aims to reduce conflict, provide understanding to all parties, and discuss the best solutions for victim recovery.

d) Psychological assistance during medical examination

Psychological assistance is provided during medical examinations when child victims of sexual violence undergo *visum et repertum* procedures at referral hospitals that collaborate with UPTD PPA Surabaya. During this process, victims not only undergo physical examinations and the issuance of medical reports, but also receive psychological assessments. These medical examinations aim to determine whether the individual has indeed experienced sexual violence, and the resulting medical report serves as legal evidence for the police and the court. Child victims often do not fully understand the medical procedures involved, such as genital examinations or the overall medical reporting process. This lack of understanding can lead to fear, shame, or anxiety. Psychological assistants play a critical role in providing a sense of safety, explaining procedures in child-friendly language, and ensuring the victim feels supported throughout the process. They also assist in conveying the victim's complaints or discomfort during the examination and serve as a communication bridge between the victim and medical personnel.

e) Psychological assistance during legal proceedings

Legal assistance is provided to victims of sexual violence as a form of protection and to ensure that their rights to justice are fulfilled. Before a case reaches the trial stage, the process begins with reporting the incident to the police. Following the report, victims undergo medical examinations, including *visum et repertum* tests, the results of which are used as part of the evidence. The police then compile an Official Investigation Report (*Berita Acara Pemeriksaan* or BAP), which serves as an official legal document in the judicial process. Once these steps are completed, the case proceeds to the court and awaits a hearing schedule.

Legal procedures such as police investigations or court trials can be intimidating for victims. Psychological assistants support victims in facing this pressure with greater emotional stability and help them find the courage to speak up. Some victims, especially children, may feel confused or guilty, often due to a lack of understanding that they have been subjected to violence. Psychological assistants play a crucial role in providing emotional validation and reinforcing the understanding that victims are not to blame for the violence they have experienced.

f) Monitoring and evaluation

The monitoring and evaluation stage represents the final part of UPTD PPA's assistance process for child victims of sexual violence. This stage ensures that services provided have a positive impact on victim recovery and serves as a foundation for future service improvement. Regular monitoring evaluates children's progress across physical, psychological, social, and educational aspects, including tracking children's rights fulfillment such as access to education, safety in their living environment, and adequate emotional support. The assistance team conducts direct visits or telephone monitoring to assess victim conditions and intervention effectiveness. This stage is crucial for ensuring continuity of child protection, preventing re-victimization, and maintaining conducive environments for children's growth and recovery.

3. Challenge in Implementation

Despite the comprehensive framework established by UPTD PPA Surabaya, several significant challenges emerged during the implementation of psychological assistance services. One of the primary obstacles encountered by the assistance team is the reluctance of children to disclose their traumatic experiences. Many victims feel afraid, ashamed, or deeply traumatized, particularly when the perpetrator is someone close to them such as a father, uncle, neighbor, or teacher. This condition complicates the information-gathering process, as victims struggle to narrate the events they experienced. In some cases, victims receive threats from perpetrators not to tell anyone about the incidents. Furthermore, some victims develop sympathy for the perpetrator when

legal proceedings begin, especially if the perpetrator is a family member, leading victims to prefer family-based resolution rather than court proceedings.

Another significant challenge in handling child sexual violence cases occurs when victims are very young, particularly in the 3-5 year age range. At this age, children's communication abilities are still limited, and they do not fully understand what has happened to them. Young children typically cannot comprehend concepts of personal body boundaries or sexual violence, making it difficult for them to describe and articulate when sexual violence has occurred. Handling sexual violence cases involving very young children often requires considerable time because information from children needs to be verified for accuracy. Additionally, the lack of early sexual education serves as a contributing factor that leaves children without basic knowledge about their own bodies, appropriate touch boundaries, and how to respond when experiencing inappropriate treatment. Many parents still consider sexual education taboo, resulting in children not receiving adequate protection from the beginning. Unsupportive social environments, such as minimal adult supervision, normalization of violence, or stigma toward victims, further compound these challenges.

During the case handling process, it was observed that the dynamics of social relationships surrounding victims significantly influence the success of psychological assistance processes. When parents or victim families are open and cooperative, assistance can proceed more smoothly. Conversely, when families prefer to cover up cases to protect their reputation or do not believe the child's account, the recovery process becomes hindered. Therefore, the active role of families is crucial in supporting the recovery process of child victims of sexual violence

4 DISCUSSIONS

Violence against children remains a significant social issue that persists and requires urgent attention from various stakeholders, particularly institutions focused on child protection. The UPTD PPA operates as a frontline institution providing assistance and support to children who are victims of violence. According to 2024 data on violence and Children in Conflict with the Law (ABH) from UPTD PPA Surabaya, there were 242 child-related cases out of a total of 342 cases handled, indicating that children are among the most vulnerable groups facing various forms of violence and violations of their rights. The most common form of violence against children is domestic violence, which accounted for 65 cases. This included 29 cases of physical violence, 10 cases of psychological violence, 6 cases of economic violence, and 20 cases of sexual violence. This situation underscores the troubling reality that homes, which should be the safest environment for children, can frequently become places of abuse. Additionally, there were 77 cases of non-domestic violence involving children, comprising 40 cases of physical violence, 5 cases of psychological violence, 6 cases of economic violence, and 26 cases of sexual violence. Notably, sexual violence emerged as a significant concern, with a total of 46 cases reported in both domestic and non-domestic contexts.

In the context of psychological assistance for survivors of child sexual violence at the UPTD PPA in Surabaya, intricate relationships were identified among the survivors' psychological well-being, their emotional connections with the perpetrators, and the dynamics of their interactions. Many victims exhibit a profound emotional attachment to the perpetrator, especially when the perpetrator is someone close to them or plays a significant role in their lives. A notable case involves a client referred to as PT, who experienced sexual violence at the hands of her foster father while living in a shelter. This situation can be understood through Bowlby's (1988) attachment theory, which asserts that children naturally form emotional bonds with their caregivers, seeing them as a source of security or a "secure base." However, when a caregiver becomes the perpetrator of violence, it creates an internal conflict for the child, leading to confusion and disorientation. Research by Pangesti and Saputri (2023) indicates that victims caught in a dilemma regarding their protectors experience significant psychological pressure, which may include feelings of shame, fear, and even suicidal thoughts, as well as difficulty recounting the traumatic events. This dynamic also affects the initial assessment process, as victims often feel reluctant and unwilling to disclose the sexual violence they have endured.

This condition is illustrated by the testimony of victim PT, who initially struggled to disclose her experience of sexual abuse due to her feelings of gratitude toward her adoptive father, the perpetrator. A similar case was observed with victim IT, a child who faced sexual violence from her elderly neighbor. This client, lacking a father figure due to her parents' divorce, lived with her mother and was often left in the neighbor's care while her mother was at work. The absence of a paternal figure can create an emotional void in children, leading them to seek comfort from other individuals who may pose a risk of becoming perpetrators of violence (Maulia et al., 2022). Consequently, these children not only experience a loss of security but also struggle to differentiate between genuine affection and manipulative behavior. In such contexts, psychological assistance is crucial in helping children develop a clearer understanding of healthy and safe relationships.

The UPTD PPA Surabaya team implements a range of psychological assistance measures, including individual counseling, assistance during the legal processes, and temporary placement in shelters. Through these initiatives, victims gradually come to understand that the perpetrator's actions constitute an unjustifiable form of violence. This process is instrumental in helping victims recognize their rights to protection and recovery. Research conducted by Sumampouw et al. (2020) indicates that child victims of sexual violence in Indonesia often experience attachment disorganization, which can significantly hinder their psychological recovery. Consequently, having a companion who serves as a safe and trustworthy figure is essential in substituting for the secure base that has been compromised by the perpetrator's actions. The importance of well-structured services provided by UPTD PPA is also noted by Furi and Saptatiningsih (2020). Their study showed that the integrated role of UPTD PPA in Bantul, which includes psychological, legal, and social assistance, made it easier for victims to access services and supported their recovery. This finding suggests that UPTD PPA Surabaya, through psychological assistance and cooperation with different sectors, offers a service model that is not only focused on responding to cases but also includes preventive and restorative efforts.

Furthermore, a study by Ramadhani & Nurwati (2022) highlights the critical role of family social support in the recovery of victims. The active involvement of parents, from accompanying victims during the handling of sexual violence cases to supporting them in the recovery stage, has been found to significantly enhance victims' confidence and social functioning. Rahmi & Hudaniah (2018) further corroborate this finding, noting that when parents provide strong social support, child victims generally feel safer and tend to recover more quickly. Conversely, a lack of support can lead to feelings of isolation and the normalization of violence. In response, UPTD PPA Surabaya also engages with victims' families to educate them on creating a healthy support system.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The psychological assistance provided by UPTD PPA Surabaya plays an important role in helping child victims of sexual violence strengthen their psychological condition while also supporting the ongoing legal process. Psychological interventions have been shown to gradually assist victims in detaching from confusing emotional bonds with the perpetrators and rebuilding an understanding of healthy relationships. The findings highlight the relevance of attachment theory in explaining why victims often struggle to sever ties with perpetrators, particularly when the perpetrator is a close figure or caregiver. Based on these result, the handling pattern at UPTD PPA can server as a theoretical reference, suggesting that attachment-based psychological interventions, combined with family involvement and cross-sector collaboration, may form a more effective strategy in addressing child sexual violence cases. Thus, this study not only describes the practical aspects of assistance but also contributes theoretically by offering a model of intervention that could be further developed in child protection contexts.

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