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Power Abuse in Child Sexual Abuse in Indonesia

Kanya Eka Santi *

Bandung Polytechnic of Social Welfare, Bandung, Indonesia

*Correspondence: kanyaekasanti@yahoo.co.id

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Abstract

Child sexual abuse (CSA) in Indonesia is a critical issue shaped by the dynamics of power abuse. This study examines how perpetrators, often trusted figures such as family members, educators, or community leaders, exploit their authority to commit sexual abuse against children. Using a multiple case study approach, the research analyzes 15 cases from various regions in Indonesia. The findings reveal that CSA frequently involves the manipulation of power through threats, inducements, and the exploitation of cultural or religious norms. Contributing factors such as patriarchal norms, social stigma, and institutional weaknesses exacerbate the vulnerability of victims and hinder their access to justice. Framed within Michel Foucault's theory, the power dynamics in these cases encompass hierarchies, normalization of violence, and discursive control. Perpetrators leverage their authority to instill fear and silence victims, while gaps in legal systems and patriarchal cultural values reinforce impunity. The long-term impact on victims includes psychological trauma, social stigma, and diminished quality of life. The study recommends strengthening child protection systems through public awareness campaigns, responsive reporting mechanisms, psychosocial support, and stricter oversight of educational and religious institutions to prevent and address CSA holistically.

Keywords: *child sexual abuse, power abuse, indonesia, michel foucault's theory*

Introduction

Child sexual abuse (CSA) has become a serious global concern, including in Indonesia. Children across various age groups and social environments are often victims of sexual crimes perpetrated by adults. CSA is not merely a matter of criminality but also a deeply complex social issue, primarily because it involves power abuse. In many cases, this violence is closely tied to power dynamics, involving authority, control, or dominance over victims. Trusted adults such as family members, educators, religious leaders, and community figures often exploit their authority to commit sexual violence. This abuse encompasses not only physical exploitation but also psychological domination and coercion, exacerbated by power imbalances. The power abuse not only breaches trust but also leaves deep physical, emotional, and social scars on victims (Prathisthita Tanaya & Puteri, 2023; Reynaert, 2015).

In Indonesia, social and cultural environmental factors worsen the prevalence of CSA. Previous studies indicate that social norms, including patriarchal beliefs and collectivist values, often protect perpetrators rather than victims (Nambiar & Said, 2024; Wismayanti et al., 2019). Children are taught to respect and obey adults, creating an environment ripe for exploitation by those in authority. This dynamic is particularly evident in cases involving family members such as fathers, uncles, or grandfathers. CSA often involves perpetrators who are close to the victims, including family members, teachers, or

community leaders, who leverage their positions to perpetuate abuse. In such situations, the violence is often concealed to protect the reputation of the family (Rumble et al., 2020; Wismayanti et al., 2019) or the institution. When children report the abuse they face, adults, including their parents, often do not believe them. Respect for and trust in authoritative figures leave children powerless in these imbalanced power relationships. Similarly, religious and educational institutions, traditionally considered safe spaces, sometimes become sanctuaries for predators exploiting the trust placed in them (Reynaert, 2015).

Data from the Indonesian Ministry of Social Affairs in 2023 reveals alarming trends in CSA cases. Each month, approximately 250–500 children are reported as victims of sexual violence, with a cumulative total of 4,667 victims by December 2023 (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2023). This number does not account for unreported cases, making CSA an iceberg phenomenon. Besides the rising numbers, the cases reported underscore the role of power abuse by adults. For instance, a father repeatedly committed sexual violence against his daughter under the guise of exercising disciplinary authority. In another case, a shaman exploited children during "rituals" purportedly to protect them from supernatural harm. These cases highlight how perpetrators manipulate the trust and authority they hold, rendering victims unable to resist. Victims also refrain from reporting the abuse due to fear, manipulation, or social stigma (Reynaert, 2015).

Although Indonesia has laws and policies aimed at protecting children from sexual violence, significant challenges remain in addressing CSA. The number of reported cases does not reflect the actual incidents due to cultural taboos, particularly in closed communities. Victim-blaming attitudes, reluctance to engage in legal processes, inefficiencies in law enforcement mechanisms, and limited professional resources are among the key barriers. Furthermore, many victims experience prolonged trauma due to difficulties in obtaining support or justice, especially when the perpetrator is a family member or a trusted community figure. This impedes victims' recovery and adversely impacts their quality of life.

The issue of power abuse in CSA has not been thoroughly examined in Indonesia, despite the high prevalence of CSA and its long-term impact. The authority and social respect held by perpetrators often serve as shields that protect them from scrutiny, leaving victims powerless to seek justice. This study aims to bridge the knowledge gap by highlighting how trusted adults exploit their positions to commit sexual abuse against children. The research involves analyzing case reports of CSA handled by the author and a team of fieldworkers.

The study poses the following research questions:

- 1) How does power abuse manifest in CSA cases in Indonesia?
- 2) What sociocultural and institutional factors contribute to the occurrence of CSA?
- 3) How does power abuse affect the ability of victims to seek support and justice?

The purpose of this study is to provide a comprehensive understanding of power abuse in CSA and to encourage policy changes or positive interventions to address it. Specifically, the study aims to analyze the role of power abuse in CSA cases involving trusted adults, identify sociocultural and institutional factors that reinforce power abuse in CSA, and offer recommendations for preventing and addressing CSA effectively.

The literature review presents key points deemed essential by the author to support the understanding and analysis of the research findings on child sexual abuse (CSA). The author adopts Michel Foucault's theory on power relations as a framework for examining power dynamics. Foucault's theory offers a lens to understand the relational, structural, and cultural dynamics of CSA. By focusing on how power operates and is resisted, his framework not only diagnoses the roots of abuse but also suggests pathways for prevention, empowerment, and systemic change. In contexts like Indonesia, where cultural and institutional factors heavily influence CSA dynamics, Foucault's insights are particularly valuable for developing holistic and culturally sensitive interventions. This section briefly explains the definition of CSA, power abuse in the context of CSA, Foucault's perspective on power dynamics in sexual violence, and the elements of power abuse in CSA.

Definition of Child Sexual Abuse

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is broadly defined as involving a child in sexual activities that they cannot comprehend, are not developmentally prepared for, or cannot legally consent to. These acts range from non-contact abuse, such as exposure to pornography, to contact abuse, including sexual penetration or exploitation (Nambiar & Said, 2024; Wismayanti et al., 2019).

According to Indonesian legislation, a child victim of sexual crime is defined as a child who experiences forced sexual relations, in an unnatural and/or undesirable manner, or forced sexual relations with another person for commercial purposes and/or specific objectives (Government Regulation No. 78 of 2021). This definition overlaps with other definitions, specifically children who are victims of physical

and psychological violence, as children experiencing sexual violence are certain to endure both types of violence.

The Sexual Violence Crimes Law No. 12 of 2022 categorizes sexual violence as a criminal act. Several acts classified as sexual violence crimes include: Non-physical sexual harassment, Physical sexual harassment, Forced contraception, Forced sterilization, Forced marriage, Sexual torture, Sexual exploitation, Sexual slavery, Cyber-based sexual violence, Rape, Acts of indecency, Sexual intercourse with children, Indecent acts involving children, Sexual exploitation of children, Acts contrary to decency and against the victim's will, Child pornography or pornography explicitly containing violence and sexual exploitation, Forced prostitution, Human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, Sexual violence within the household, Money laundering where the predicate crime constitutes sexual violence, and Other crimes explicitly declared as sexual violence crimes (Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 12 of 2022; Nurisman, 2022).

Power Abuse in the Context of Child Sexual Abuse

Power abuse refers to the exploitation of authority, trust, or dependency relationships to perpetuate abuse. Power dynamics play a central role, as perpetrators often leverage their authority to manipulate, coerce, or silence their victims. Sexual abuse inherently involves a misuse of power, reflecting broader societal inequalities (Reynaert, 2015).

In cases of child sexual abuse (CSA), power abuse frequently occurs in hierarchical relationships where the abuser holds a position of trust or authority, such as family members, teachers, religious leaders, or community figures (Prathisthita Tanaya & Puteri, 2023). The misuse of power often extends beyond physical coercion to include psychological manipulation. Studies indicate that cultural norms in patriarchal societies exacerbate these dynamics by perpetuating silence and victim-blaming (Nambiar & Said, 2024; Rumble et al., 2020).

Perpetrators exploit their societal status, religious authority, or familial roles to ensure victim compliance and prevent exposure. For instance, patriarchal systems in Indonesia place children, particularly girls, in vulnerable positions by emphasizing obedience and discouraging the disclosure of abuse (Wismayanti et al., 2019).

The unequal power relations highlighted by Foucault's theory emphasize how societal structures perpetuate abuse through normalization and control. Foucault posits that power is omnipresent and operates through relationships and social structures, which, in the case of child sexual abuse (CSA), are evident in family dynamics, educational institutions, and community settings (Prathisthita Tanaya & Puteri, 2023). This perspective helps us understand how power relations are misused to facilitate sexual crimes. Foucault proposes several assumptions that the author employs to explain the dynamics of power abuse in CSA.

1. Power is relational, not possessed. Foucault argues that power is not something individuals or groups own; rather, it exists within relationships. It is enacted and maintained through social interactions, norms, and structures. In the context of sexual abuse, this manifests as perpetrators leveraging their social, physical, or institutional authority to manipulate or dominate their victims (Foucault, 1990, 2016). In CSA, power is embedded in the relationship between the perpetrator (often an adult in authority) and the child, shaped by trust, dependency, and societal hierarchies.
2. Power operates everywhere. Power is omnipresent and functions at all levels of society, including within families, institutions, and cultural norms. This assumption is crucial for understanding how CSA can occur not only in private spaces, such as homes, but also in public institutions like schools or religious settings.
3. Power produces knowledge and normalizes behavior. Power shapes what is regarded as "truth" or "knowledge," often normalizing behaviors that sustain hierarchies. In the context of CSA, cultural norms—such as "respect for elders" or the silence surrounding sexuality—are used to justify or conceal abusive behaviors. Furthermore, cultural narratives emphasizing family loyalty or victim-blaming serve as mechanisms of power to suppress disclosure and hinder justice (Foucault, 1990, 2016).
4. Disciplinary power and surveillance. Foucault introduces the concept of disciplinary power, which employs observation and normalization to control behavior. Perpetrators of CSA may create environments of constant surveillance and psychological control, further disempowering victims (Foucault, 1975).
5. Resistance is inherent to power. Where there is power, there is also the potential for resistance. Understanding the dynamics of power provides insights into empowering victims and dismantling abusive systems.

In its most extreme form, power abuse in sexual relationships is demonstrated through the total subjugation of autonomy. In abusive relationships, particularly those involving children, power is exercised to completely eliminate the victim's autonomy. This is achieved through physical dominance, psychological manipulation, and the exploitation of societal norms. Additionally, Foucault highlights the concept of "silencing through social and institutional mechanisms," wherein institutions such as schools, religious organizations, and families perpetuate abuse by prioritizing their reputations over justice for victims (Foucault, 1990, 2016). Foucault also observes how society constructs deviant sexualities as "truths" through discourse, a process that can obscure and even justify abusive behaviors (Foucault, 1990).

Elements of Power Abuse in CSA

According to Foucault (1990), power abuse in sexual relationships is characterized, first and foremost, by trust exploitation, wherein perpetrators often occupy roles that inherently require trust, such as parents, family members, teachers, coaches, or religious leaders. This trust acts as a shield, granting them access to children without arousing suspicion. Conversely, the child feels emotionally dependent on the abuser and may not recognize the behavior as abuse. Perpetrators often leverage their trusted positions to groom and manipulate victims, creating significant barriers to disclosure (French et al., 1997). In Indonesia, studies indicate that abusers within families, such as fathers or uncles, exploit their roles as protectors or caregivers to initiate and sustain abuse (Nambiar & Said, 2024; Wismayanti et al., 2019).

The second element is coercion and control, where abusers employ threats, manipulation, or emotional tactics to maintain the victim's silence and compliance. Power is sustained through methods such as intimidation, guilt-tripping, or emotional manipulation, ensuring that the child remains silent (Nambiar & Said, 2024; Reynaert, 2015). The mechanisms used by perpetrators include physical coercion, where the abuser might threaten violence against the child or their loved ones if the child resists or discloses the abuse. Additionally, perpetrators frequently resort to emotional coercion or emotional blackmail, such as telling the child that they will destroy the family or that the child will be blamed for the abuse. These tactics create significant psychological barriers to disclosure. Research from Southeast Asia underscores that many victims feel paralyzed by the threats issued by abusers, who manipulate feelings of guilt by emphasizing the victim's perceived complicity in the abuse (Reynaert, 2015; Rumble et al., 2020).

The third element, dependence and vulnerability, is also critical, as power abuse thrives on the inherent dependence children have on adults for emotional, physical, and financial support. Perpetrators exploit this dependence to ensure the child's silence and submission. For instance, a child may fear losing access to basic needs or affection if they resist the abuse. The situation is even more dire for children with disabilities or those from economically disadvantaged households. These children are particularly vulnerable because they often rely on the abuser for specialized care or financial stability. Research on disabled children highlights that they face additional barriers to reporting abuse due to their reliance on abusers for mobility, care, or communication (Higgins & Swain, 2009; Nambiar & Said, 2024).

Foucault also highlights the element of cultural and institutional silence. In this context, societal norms and institutional inaction create an environment where abuse can thrive unchecked. In Indonesia, according to Wismayanti et al. (2019), social taboos surrounding discussions of sexual matters and weak institutional responses further empower abusers. Two mechanisms are involved in this phenomenon: cultural silence and institutional gaps. Cultural silence can be explained by the norms in patriarchal societies, which often discourage individuals from speaking out against authority figures, particularly male family members. Victims may fear ostracization or punishment for exposing abuse. Institutional gaps are characterized by weak legal frameworks or untrained professionals who often fail to recognize or act upon signs of abuse, thereby enabling perpetrators to continue their actions unchecked (Prathisthita Tanaya & Puteri, 2023; Wismayanti et al., 2019).

The final element related to power abuse is the normalization of power inequality. This element is reflected in the perpetuation of abuse in societies where unequal power relations between adults and children are normalized. In many cultures, children are perceived as subordinate, with limited agency or voice. Perpetrators exploit this power imbalance to assert dominance and control. Gender inequality further exacerbates the issue, as girls, in particular, are often socialized to submit to male authority figures, making them more vulnerable (Nambiar & Said, 2024; Reynaert, 2015). Research on livestreamed CSA in Indonesia highlights how societal perceptions of children as powerless facilitate both online and offline exploitation (Prathisthita Tanaya & Puteri, 2023).

The elements of power abuse are deeply interconnected with societal norms, cultural practices, and personal relationships. Together, they form a system that allows perpetrators to exploit their authority with minimal risk of exposure or accountability. Understanding these elements is essential for developing targeted interventions and empowering children to break the cycle of silence and abuse.

Previous Studies on Power Abuse and Child Sexual Abuse

The existing literature provides critical insights into power abuse in CSA across both global and ASEAN contexts. Studies from Southeast Asia, such as those conducted in the Philippines, indicate that cultural norms, including familial hierarchy and patriarchal structures, often protect perpetrators while silencing victims. For instance, research highlights the vulnerability of female adolescents during periods of heightened isolation, such as community quarantines, where familial roles are leveraged to exert control and perpetuate abuse (Dela Rosa et al., 2023; Sales et al., 2023). This aligns with findings from Indonesia, where close family members are frequently identified as perpetrators, exploiting their authority and social ties to suppress disclosures. These studies underscore the urgent need for comprehensive policy interventions and child protection mechanisms tailored to both cultural and systemic factors prevalent in ASEAN and low- to middle-income countries.

Methods

The author employs a multiple case study method, a research approach involving the investigation of several interrelated cases to understand a phenomenon. This method aims to identify similarities and differences among the cases within a specific context (Yin, 2018, p. 55). The multiple case study approach enables the researcher to provide a deeper understanding of child sexual abuse while respecting the uniqueness of each case (Stake, 2013).

Fifteen cases were selected by the author to illustrate power abuse in child sexual violence. These cases are geographically distributed across several regions of Indonesia as follows: West Java (1 case, 1 survivor); Banten (1 case, 3 survivors); Central Java (1 case, 15 survivors); East Java (2 cases, 4 survivors); Sumatera (1 case, 3 survivors); Riau Islands (2 cases, 4 survivors); East Nusa Tenggara (2 cases, 9 survivors); Maluku (1 case, 1 survivor); and North Sulawesi (1 case, 1 survivor). The highest number of survivors was found in Central Java, where one perpetrator abused 15 female children, followed by East Nusa Tenggara. This geographical distribution demonstrates that child sexual abuse is a national issue that transcends regional boundaries.

The multiple case study approach was chosen because the researcher was directly involved in handling these cases alongside the team. During the case handling process, the author and team members obtained consent and formal agreements from all parties to manage the cases. However, for the purpose of this article, the author upholds strict ethical standards when working with children. Consequently, although the study employs case studies, detailed descriptions of individual cases, personal information about survivors, perpetrators, and their families are not disclosed. Identities have been anonymized through pseudonymization. Regarding locations, the author does not specify village or district names, mentioning only the provinces where the cases occurred.

This research has limitations as it is based on data from 15 cases involving 41 survivors. The depiction of child sexual abuse is solely derived from these cases. For this article, the author prioritizes the best interests of the survivors, focusing on thematic patterns and findings to contribute to academic and practical understanding of child sexual abuse issues. All analyses and research outcomes are aimed at encouraging policy improvements and better interventions for child protection in the future.

This study is not intended to exploit case data, worsen stigma against survivors, or generalize the conditions of other CSA cases. The author uses both the terms “victim” and “survivor.” The term “victim” is used to describe the context of sexual crimes resulting in harm, while “survivor” is employed to highlight the resilience of individuals who endure and receive treatment to address the impact of the abuse they have experienced.

Results

In this section, the author describes the profiles of child sexual abuse (CSA) survivors, encompassing the characteristics of survivors and their families, the manifestation of power abuse in CSA, and responses to the research questions: How does power abuse manifest in CSA cases in Indonesia? What sociocultural and institutional factors contribute to the occurrence of CSA? How does power abuse impact survivors' ability to seek support and justice? To maintain confidentiality and protect the interests

of survivors and their families, all descriptions in the profiles do not use real names or initials. This also applies to the profiles of families and perpetrators.

1. Survivor Profiles

Gender and Age of Survivors

Of the 41 survivors, 87.8% (36 children) are female, while the remaining 12.2% (5 children) are male. The most common age group is 11–15 years (53.7%), followed by 16–20 years (36.6%), with the rest being under 10 years old. Younger survivors are more likely to be persuaded or manipulated by perpetrators, particularly those who do not yet comprehend the threat of sexual violence. In terms of education level, most survivors are elementary school students (43.9%), followed by junior high school students (7.3%) and senior high school students (39.0%). Some survivors are not attending school or have dropped out due to economic factors or the impact of the violence they experienced.

Family Conditions of Survivors

The author identified the parental status of the survivors, with 7 cases originating from single-parent households due to divorce, abandonment, or death. In one case (AA), the mother passed away in 2017. A year later, she experienced sexual abuse by her stepfather. The abuse resulted in pregnancy and the survivor being infected with HIV. In another case, OO's mother left in 2020 to work abroad after her parents divorced in 2017. The victim was very close to her mother and often communicated with her by phone. However, the mother never returned, and when OO reached the 5th grade of elementary school (2022), she became a victim of sexual abuse by her father. This lasted for approximately a year until the survivor was discovered to be pregnant.

The majority (14 cases) of the survivors' families came from underprivileged backgrounds. This condition relates to the family's ability to provide optimal protection. For instance, in terms of housing conditions, the average family home was classified as inadequate. Homes lacked separate rooms, or had a limited number of rooms, making it impossible for girls to sleep separately. In some cases, limited space was used as a bedroom for many family members. For example, IG's family lived in substandard housing conditions. Their house had no electricity access, no clean water (relying solely on rainwater), and no toilet. Of all the cases handled, only one family did not receive government social assistance, specifically from the Ministry of Social Affairs. The status of families as recipients of social assistance also reflects their economic conditions.

Vulnerability of Survivors

As previously mentioned, 53.7% of the 41 survivors were aged between 11-15 years and were at the elementary school level. This indicates that young age is a vulnerability factor. Children often lack the understanding of what is happening or how to protect themselves, as exemplified by the case of RR (8 years old) who experienced sexual abuse by a close relative, her mother's older brother, or AP (6 years old) and PH (4 years old) who were victims of sodomy by their biological father.

Another aspect of vulnerability is the presence of disabilities. Among the 15 cases that the author handled and reviewed, there was one survivor (SS) with an intellectual disability. SS, who was lured by the perpetrator to a specific location, was unable to resist due to difficulties in understanding the situation and disclosing the abuse. She felt confused about what was happening, and in the process of handling her case, the team needed various tools to gather information about the incident. This information was crucial for the social report for the sake of legal proceedings, as the case was later reported to the police, although the family initially objected to reporting.

Family situations such as divorce, one parent leaving for work or unknown reasons, the death of a father or mother, children being raised by extended family (grandparents/uncles/aunts), or being placed in religious institutions also contribute to vulnerability to CSA. Children in these situations may not receive adequate care and supervision that protects them from CSA perpetrators.

Types of Abuse, Duration of Abuse, and Impact on Survivors

The types of abuse experienced by most survivors involve intercourse, whether preceded by molestation or not. Two male survivors were sodomized by their biological fathers, while two other children were sodomized by neighbours. Additionally, nine children experienced molestation by individuals identified as teachers.

Sexual violence lasts for varying durations, from one incident to years. For example, the IM case lasted five years in a religious-based institution and PM was a victim for six years from elementary school age. The perpetrators carried out the violence that befell the PM in stages. When he was in grade 1 of elementary school, what the perpetrator did was harass the survivor. When the survivor reached fourth grade in elementary school, the perpetrator began raping PM, almost every day in the garden. The perpetrator is 65 year old RB, the victim's neighbour and good friend of the victim's grandfather. What IG experienced is not much different from PM. For three years he was a victim of his 72 year old neighbour RO. All sexual crimes were committed in the perpetrator's house when the house was quiet and the perpetrator's wife was lying in another room because she was sick. Over the years, neither survivor has conveyed the sexual violence they experienced to their families. Both PM and IG then became pregnant. PM's parents found out about PM's pregnancy when she was about to give birth but then the baby died. This condition creates fear in the PM. Of the 15 cases that were the unit of analysis, 5 children became pregnant as a result of CSA.

In addition to physical injuries, survivors commonly experience psychological impacts such as depression, anxiety, shame, and fear. Psychiatric and psychological evaluations revealed cases such as NN, who felt anxious and powerless, and MM, who suffered from severe trauma and frequent crying spells. Survivors reported difficulties sleeping, nightmares, frequent trembling, loss of appetite, and reluctance to leave their homes. The long-term impacts on survivors include dropping out of school, loss of motivation, and social difficulties due to stigma. Many survivors become withdrawn, afraid to speak, or lose self-confidence, further complicating their recovery and reintegration into society."

2. Manifestations of Power Abuse in Cases of Child Sexual Abuse in Indonesia

The analysis of all case data reveals that power abuse by perpetrators is closely related to specific conditions.

Position and Relationship between Perpetrators and Survivors

Perpetrators often hold positions of trust or authority. Survivors place significant trust in the perpetrators, seeing them as loved ones or protectors. It is therefore unsurprising that perpetrators often come from within the survivors' circle of trust. In the 15 cases analyzed, there were 15 perpetrators, including: Biological fathers (2 cases), Stepfathers (1 case), Other family members/uncles/mother's brothers (1 case), Healers/tire repairmen (1 case), Neighbours who were also religious tutors (1 case), Neighbours who were friends of the survivor's grandfather (1 case), Neighbours (2 cases), Mother's boyfriend (1 case), Teachers (3 cases), Motorcycle taxi drivers (1 case), Religious institution administrators/religious leaders (1 case). From these perpetrator profiles, informal power positions are evident in biological fathers, stepfathers, and other family members. Formal power, on the other hand, is wielded by those with roles as educators or religious figures. Even in the case of neighbours, survivors trusted them due to their perceived social proximity. For instance, in PM's case, the perpetrator was not only a neighbour but also a close friend of the survivor's grandfather. Similarly, in IG's case, the perpetrator was a neighbour whose house the survivor passed daily and could even see from her home. In these various roles, perpetrators manipulated survivors through threats or moral/religious justifications, exploiting their positions of trust and authority to commit and perpetuate abuse.

Age Disparity Between Perpetrator and Survivor

Most perpetrators were adult men aged between 30 and 70 years. The significant age difference between perpetrators and survivors highlights a profound imbalance of power in their relationships. This age disparity creates a natural hierarchy in social interactions, where children typically view adults as authority figures deserving of respect and obedience. Perpetrators exploited their adult status to instill fear through physical or verbal threats, as observed in the cases of AA and PM. AA frequently experienced physical violence, including blows to the head, chest, hands, legs, and other parts of her body. The perpetrator often struck the survivor with a belt. Additionally, the perpetrator coerced AA to terminate her pregnancy while continuing to commit sexual violence. In PM's case, she was subjected to years of threats, including being told she would be beaten if she disclosed the abuse to her parents.

Control Over Survivors

Perpetrators also exert control over survivors by offering "gifts," typically in the form of small amounts of money. In the cases handled and reviewed by the author, the amount given to elementary school children ranged from Rp. 2,000 to a maximum of Rp. 50,000. For children from underprivileged families who never received pocket money, these amounts were highly appealing, even though it came at the cost of their victimization. The children used the money to buy snacks they previously could not afford. In cases involving children victimized in religious-based institutions, the amount of money given ranged from Rp. 100,000 to Rp. 200,000, with the condition that the money was considered a mahar (dowry) for the "marriage," as the survivors were made to believe they had been "married."

Manipulation of Trust

Exploiting the significant age difference, perpetrators manipulate the trust of survivors, who, due to their developmental stage, are unable to understand the risks or recognize the perpetrator's malicious intent. In a case involving a teacher, the survivor was asked to assist with filling out data. Believing that her classmates were also involved, she unsuspectingly complied with the teacher's request. The first instance of sexual violence occurred in an empty school after hours. The second incident took place at the perpetrator's home while his wife and children were away. The survivor did not dare to refuse due to fear. The perpetrator combined manipulation with threats, warning the survivor that she would fail her grade if she did not comply.

In another case involving a religious leader in a faith-based institution, manipulation was carried out by convincing survivors that their future was bleak. To receive blessings and secure a pious husband, they were told to obey the leader's demands. They were threatened with severe sin, misery, or even madness if they refused. Before being raped, survivors were coerced into a *nikah siri* (unregistered marriage) ceremony, forced to recite marriage vows (*ijab qabul*) without guardians or witnesses. According to the perpetrator, the marriage was valid because it was witnessed by God and angels. Following this, the survivor was given an amount ranging from Rp. 100,000 to Rp. 200,000, which was presented as the mahar (dowry). The survivor was then sexually assaulted/raped. This was repeated multiple times under the pretense that the perpetrator and the survivor were married.

This description clearly demonstrates that perpetrators employ various methods, including threats, financial inducements, emotional manipulation, and religious doctrines, to commit sexual violence against children. Other tactics include the use of physical violence or specific tools to intimidate survivors into silence. In one case, a perpetrator who was regarded as a paranormal practitioner deceived the survivor's mother. The mother, who accompanied a relative to seek treatment from the practitioner, was unaware of the manipulation when the perpetrator claimed that her daughter (the victim) had a negative aura caused by supernatural disturbances. The perpetrator insisted that the survivor needed to be bathed with flowers. The mother was asked to pray outside while the perpetrator and the survivor were alone in the bathroom. The survivor reported feeling utterly powerless during the sexual assault, as did her mother. Both described feeling hypnotized and only realized what had happened after returning home.

3. Sociocultural and Institutional Factors Contributing to Child Sexual Abuse

The author identified several sociocultural and institutional factors that contribute to the occurrence of CSA, which also hinder efforts to prevent and address these cases in Indonesia.

The first factor is patriarchal norms and collectivism. In Indonesian society, the authority of parents or other adults is highly respected. Children are taught and accustomed to obey adults without questioning their authority. This creates an environment where victims find it difficult to report abuse, especially if the perpetrator is a figure of authority within the family or community. In the cases studied, this condition was compounded by a lack of parenting competence, with parents rarely or never paying attention to their children's physical and emotional conditions. Most parents were economically disadvantaged farmers, spending most of their time working in the fields or seeking additional income. Within smaller institutions, such as schools or religious organizations, similar norms of compliance were observed. In one case involving a religious institution where 15 children were victimized, all survivors chose to "comply." Even among the survivors themselves, there was a reluctance to discuss the abuse with one another. Their chosen course of action was to request their parents to transfer them to another school. The case only came to light after an increasing number of children requested to leave the institution and some parents began questioning the reasons.

The second factor is social stigma against survivors. Survivors often face stigma and self-blame, reinforced by societal attitudes. For instance, survivors frequently feel ashamed if their cases become public knowledge, reducing their willingness to seek justice. In the villages where some survivors lived, as observed and inquired by the author, neighbours speculated and whispered among themselves when the author visited the survivors' homes. This was common in rural communities with close-knit social structures. Survivors reported feeling ashamed to leave their homes, especially in cases where pregnancy was involved, as they believed the neighbours were watching them. The problem lies in the lack of public understanding that child sexual abuse is a crime and a public issue—not something to be gossiped about, resolved through familial arrangements, or concealed.

The third factor is weak oversight, as seen in cases occurring in schools or religious-based institutions. Perpetrators exploited systemic weaknesses, such as the absence of adult caregivers in dormitories, limited security measures in schools or dormitories, and the lack of secure and confidential reporting mechanisms for victims. In school-based cases, perpetrators took advantage of specific times, such as when teachers and students had left the school, during breaks, or other activities, to commit their crimes under various pretexts. In religious-based institutions, perpetrators frequently woke survivors between 1:00 AM and 3:00 AM to commit their crimes in isolated areas of the institution. Sometimes, the abuse occurred during the day when the perpetrator encountered the survivor and dragged them to a secluded spot within the institution that was not monitored.

4. The Impact of Power Abuse on Survivors' Ability to Seek Support and Justice

Fear and Trauma

The survivors' experiences of power abuse significantly affected their ability to seek support and justice. Physical and psychological threats from the perpetrators instilled deep fear in the survivors, preventing them from reporting the violence. In all cases, survivors chose to remain silent due to fear of the consequences they might face, such as threats to their safety or that of their families. In one case, a child attempted to speak out, but their parents did not believe them because the perpetrator was a figure of authority.

Lack of Social Support

Of the 14 cases studied, survivors came from economically disadvantaged families or socially vulnerable situations. This exacerbates their inability to report the abuse or seek support. Even when families are aware of the abuse, social stigma often prevents them from taking legal action. In one case in Sumatra, where customary law is strongly upheld, social workers urged the family to report the abuse to the police, but the response was, "We are waiting for the decision of the customary elders. If everyone knows about this issue, we would be shamed." In another case, in a village in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), the parents initially distrusted a team from the Ministry of Social Affairs. Amid their despair over their daughter's pregnancy caused by the abuse, the victim's father sought assistance from the team to address their problems. The father pointed to their bamboo-walled, dirt-floored house with two rooms—one used as a sleeping space for the family of five, including a 7-year-old son—and another room in the front with four plastic chairs and a kitchen. The family's bedding consisted of a worn plastic mat. The house had no electricity, no access to clean water, and no toilet. They usually relied on neighbours for water or collected rainwater, which was scarce. For bathing and other needs, they either borrowed water from neighbours or used a rainwater storage container in front of their house. By midday, the mother would cook rice using the remaining grains they had, while cassava leaves boiled with salt served as their daily meal. They lacked other spices because they had no money to shop, except when receiving financial aid. This was their daily routine. Through tears, the mother pleaded for assistance for her daughter. Despite neighbours being aware of the situation, no support was extended to the family. The problems they faced were deeply complex—sexual violence was not the only issue, but a broader, more urgent issue of poverty lay at the root.

Long-Term Psychological Impacts

Survivors exhibit symptoms of trauma, such as sadness, anxiety, and nightmares. Some victims have even attempted self-harm as a way to escape their situations. This is especially evident in cases

involving pregnant children. In one case, although the child she was carrying had passed away, the survivor expressed a belief that justice might only exist in a faraway place, saying she wanted to go as far away as possible. This metaphorical statement requires careful attention from counselors, given the vulnerability of the survivor after six years of enduring sexual violence. To this day, the survivor occasionally experiences nightmares, especially when mocked or ridiculed by others. This highlights the ongoing psychological scars and the need for sustained support and care for survivors.

Discussion

Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in Indonesia is not a singular factor of how a child becomes a victim but rather reflects the complex dynamics of power abuse. As previously discussed, these dynamics involve multiple risk factors, including the vulnerability of the victim, weak protection from parents or caregivers, societal indifference, and the interplay of power with these various risk situations. The 15 cases analyzed also illustrate that CSA is closely linked to social hierarchies, cultural norms, and institutional weaknesses.

Data analysis shows that power abuse in CSA in Indonesia manifests in various ways, often supported by the perpetrator's position of authority. Several patterns of manifestation were identified, including the **manipulation of power relationships**. Perpetrators, often parents, teachers, or religious figures, leverage their position of trust to approach and control victims. In some cases, such as a stepfather raping his stepdaughter, the perpetrator's power is used to threaten the survivor into silence.

Perpetrators also **use power as a form of threat against survivors**. This includes physical violence, death threats, or threats of expulsion from school, which are used to silence survivors and ensure the continuity of abuse. For instance, a perpetrator who was a teacher threatened survivors with poor grades to exert control. Another factor is the **blending of violence with social or religious practices**. Some perpetrators exploit religious rituals or beliefs to justify their actions. For example, a religious figure convinced survivors that the abuse was part of a "marriage" or a form of "protection from supernatural dangers." In another case, a traditional healer justified abuse by claiming it was necessary to expel "evil auras" from the survivor's body.

An analysis using Foucault's theory of power provides deep insight into how power relations manifest through hierarchy, discipline, normalization of violence, and symbolic power, as well as how survivors demonstrate resistance in oppressive contexts.

1. **Hierarchy of Power Between Perpetrator and Survivor**

The hierarchy of power is evident in the roles of perpetrators, such as fathers, uncles, teachers, or religious figures, who hold authority and exploit these power relationships to dominate survivors. Foucault (1975) emphasizes that power is not merely possessed but is produced through hierarchical relationships. Perpetrators leverage these relationships to control victims through threats or emotional manipulation. Age and social status disparities further reinforce this hierarchy. For instance, in cases involving biological or stepfathers, perpetrators exploit their role as family protectors to gain access to victims and control them through threats or physical violence. In cases involving teachers or religious figures, the perpetrators' formal positions as educators or spiritual leaders provide social legitimacy to conceal their actions, exploiting the trust granted by families and communities.

2. **Discipline and Normalization of Violence**

According to Foucault (1975), power operates through discipline and normalization, shaping behaviors deemed "ordinary" or "acceptable." In the cases studied by the author, the normalization of violence was established through authoritative discipline when perpetrators, such as teachers, parents, or religious figures, used threats of poor grades, physical punishment, or religious doctrines to instill fear and obedience. For instance, perpetrators in religious-based institutions justified their sexual violence by invoking the pretext of "marriage." Additionally, in some cases, perpetrators perpetuated the notion that their actions were part of family discipline, particularly when the victim's mother had passed away. This created an environment that allowed perpetrators to act without resistance, normalizing abuse as part of the victims' lived reality.

3. **The Use of Symbolic Power**

Symbolic power is a primary tool used by perpetrators to reinforce their dominance. This power is exercised by leveraging social status or religious symbols to conceal their actions. For example, a perpetrator in a religious-based institution justified their abusive behavior by claiming it was intended to bring blessings to the victim and ensure they would marry a pious man. Victims were instructed to obey

the perpetrator, with warnings that refusal would result in severe sin, misery in life, or even madness. This manipulation of symbolic power highlights how perpetrators exploit cultural and religious narratives to silence victims and maintain control, further embedding abuse within societal and institutional structures.

4. *Survivor Resistance within the Framework of Power*

Foucault (1990) emphasizes that where there is power, there is also resistance. Although survivors are often in vulnerable positions, some demonstrate resistance, either directly or symbolically. In IG's case, she consistently tried to avoid the perpetrator; however, as they lived in the same house, she remained a target. This differed from her younger sibling, who actively resisted and thus avoided becoming a victim. Open resistance is shown by survivors who disclose the violence they experienced, despite facing threats and stigma. For example, a survivor who became pregnant by her mother's boyfriend informed her mother that her belly was growing, forcing the perpetrator to confess his actions. Meanwhile, in a religious institution, survivors chose to leave the institution as an act of resistance against the perpetrator.

5. *Perpetrator Impunity and the Reproduction of Power*

Perpetrator impunity is often supported by weaknesses in the legal system and cultural norms that protect offenders. Foucault (1990) also explains how power is reproduced through institutions. Weak oversight in schools and religious institutions allows perpetrators to continue their actions without consequences. Foucault refers to this as impunity through institutional silence (Foucault, 1990). In cases of sexual violence committed by a sports teacher, the perpetrator denied the accusations and therefore did not face strict scrutiny, either from colleagues or the institution. Furthermore, the perpetrator was considered accomplished, as they often helped students compete in championships. To prevent the cycle of violence from recurring, when the author and the team met with the parents of survivors, particularly those who had not reported their cases, they consistently encouraged parents to have the courage to report to the authorities. When perpetrators are not punished, they reinforce norms that allow sexual violence to persist. This underscores the urgent need to break the cycle of silence and hold perpetrators accountable to ensure justice for survivors and to prevent future cases of abuse.

6. *Long-Term Impacts on Survivors and Cultural Implications*

A critical aspect that requires serious attention and intervention is the impact of sexual violence on survivors. In-depth assessments reveal that survivors experience significant psychological, social, and emotional effects, including trauma, anxiety, loss of self-confidence, and social stigma. In some cases, survivors exhibit symptoms of long-term trauma, such as nightmares or self-harm attempts. For children who became pregnant (5 survivors), the burden is even greater as they must cope with the birth of a child. This situation also places additional strain on their families, as these children are often raised in inadequate circumstances. Furthermore, survivors may drop out of school due to these conditions, jeopardizing their overall well-being and future prospects. Many child well-being indicators may not or cannot be achieved under these circumstances. The impact on survivors worsens when there is economic or emotional dependence on the perpetrator. Such dependence further limits the survivors' ability to seek justice or support, highlighting how power operates at both interpersonal and structural levels. Several studies have shown that the challenges faced by children who are victims of sexual violence persist into adulthood. These include physical, mental, and emotional health problems; internalizing behaviors such as trauma/PTSD, anxiety, and depression; externalizing behaviors such as substance use, risky sexual behavior, and criminal activity; interpersonal relationship issues; socioeconomic challenges; spiritual and religious struggles; vulnerability to revictimization; and broader societal impacts (Dube et al., 2005; Fisher et al., 2017).

At the cultural level, the normalization of power imbalances between children and adults reinforces a patriarchal system that is detrimental to children. All the cases studied involved female victims, although two male children were also among the survivors. Most children aged 4–10 years were confused and did not fully understand what had happened to them, with some in this age group even becoming pregnant. Even older survivors in advanced education levels had never received education about sexual violence, particularly on how to protect their bodies. In cases where children were victimized by neighbors, parental negligence had fatal consequences. This condition serves as a reminder for all of us to prioritize the safety of children and protect them from all forms of violence.

Conclusion and Suggestion

Conclusion

Sexual violence constitutes a violation of human rights, a crime against human dignity, and a form of discrimination that must be taken seriously and addressed comprehensively. Based on 15 cases analyzed, it can be concluded that child sexual abuse (CSA) in Indonesia is a result of imbalanced power relations. Perpetrators exploit authority, trust, and the dependency of victims to perpetuate abuse. The perpetrator's position as an authority figure enables them to use threats, symbolic manipulation, and cultural normalization to control the survivors. The disparities in age and social status reinforce this power hierarchy, rendering survivors powerless to resist or report the abuse they experience.

Within the framework of Foucault's theory, the perpetrator's power is evident through mechanisms of discipline, normalization, and discursive control. Perpetrators employ physical violence, threats of punitive consequences such as poor grades or failure to advance to the next grade, and even religious narratives to foster compliance and silence victims. Additionally, the perpetrators' impunity is bolstered by patriarchal culture and the suboptimal enforcement of laws, which structurally reproduces unequal power relations, allowing the cycle of violence to persist without adequate sanctions.

The impact of CSA on survivors is profound, including psychological trauma, social stigma, and long-term detriment to their well-being. Thus, addressing CSA requires cultural changes that promote equality and child protection, strengthening institutional oversight mechanisms, and policy reforms to ensure strict punishment for perpetrators. Empowerment-based approaches and education are also necessary to break the cycle of violence and provide better protection for children.

Suggestions

Based on these findings, the author proposes several recommendations to build a more responsive and reliable child protection system to prevent and address CSA:

1. Raising Public Awareness. Conduct public campaigns to challenge patriarchal norms and reduce stigma against victims. Sustained efforts are also needed to increase parental awareness of child abuse and parenting competencies.
2. Strengthening Reporting Systems. Establish safe, confidential, and easily accessible reporting mechanisms in educational institutions and communities.
3. Enhancing Psychosocial Support. Provide counseling services to victims and their families to mitigate long-term psychological impacts.
4. Strict Oversight of Educational and Religious Institutions and Social Services. Enforce stricter regulations for all institutions involving children, including the activities of authority figures in schools, faith-based communities, and child welfare services where children are frequently placed.

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Author/Authors Brief Bio

Kanya Eka Santi

Lecturer at Bandung Polytechnic of Social Welfare. Former Secretary of the Directorate General of Social Rehabilitation and Director of Social Rehabilitation for Children, Ministry of Social Affairs of Indonesia. Doctor in Sociology (University of Indonesia), Master of Social Work (Curtin University of Technology), Sarjana (Bachelor) of Social Work (Bandung College of Social Welfare).

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