

# UNRAVELING THE EFFECTS OF LAX ENFORCEMENT OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT POLICY AT ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOLS IN WEST JAVA, INDONESIA

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**Abstract.** This study investigates the effects of lax enforcement of sexual harassment policies in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*). It analyzes how inadequate disciplinary measures impact victims, the educational environment, and community perceptions. Through a mixed method, including surveys, in-depth interviews, and field observations, this study aims to shed light on the urgency for robust policies and effective enforcement to ensure the safety and well-being of students. This paper explores how *pesantren* in West Java, Indonesia, actively challenge stereotypes linking religious institutions to sexual harassment. Often mischaracterized as patriarchal and resistant to addressing social issues, *pesantren* refute these perceptions by fostering environments rooted in Islamic values of dignity, respect, and ethical conduct. *Pesantrens* shape society's moral, ethical, and spiritual values. However, cases of sexual harassment and weak enforcement of related policies have raised serious concerns about the integrity of these institutions. This study examines the social, psychological, and institutional impacts of inadequate disciplinary measures on victims, perpetrators, and the *pesantren* community. The findings reveal how lenient sanctions perpetuate a culture of impunity, erode trust, and undermine the moral authority of *pesantrens*, calling for immediate reforms aligned with Islamic and human rights principles.

**Keywords:** Islamic Boarding School; Lax Enforcement; Misinterpretation; Sexual Harassment; Stereotype

## I. INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools, known as *pesantrens*, are revered as institutions of moral and spiritual education in by a lack of firmness in implementing sanctions against perpetrators, which often results in detrimental outcomes for victims and the community. The *pesantrens* are pivotal in shaping the values and education of young Muslims. However, reports of sexual harassment in these settings pose significant challenges to student safety. The enforcement of sexual harassment policies is often inconsistent, leading to an environment where victims may feel unsupported.

The weak enforcement of sexual harassment policies not only leaves victims without justice but also enables perpetrators to act without accountability. This leniency compromises the safety of students and tarnishes the credibility of *pesantrens*, which are meant to exemplify Islamic principles of justice and compassion. This study aims to: (1) Examine existing policies on sexual harassment in Islamic boarding schools; (2) Identify the effects of lax enforcement on victims, perpetrators, and the institutional environment; and (3) Propose actionable recommendations for strengthening policy enforcement in alignment with Islamic and human rights standards. The findings provide

redominantly Muslim societies. However, recurring incidents of sexual harassment in some *pesantrens* have exposed significant shortcomings in their governance and disciplinary systems. The issue is compounded valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and religious leaders seeking to create safer, more accountable learning environments in *pesantrens*.

### Sexual Harassment in Educational Institutions

Research highlights that power dynamics, lack of awareness, and inadequate institutional responses often exacerbate sexual harassment in schools. Studies emphasize the importance of clear policies and firm enforcement to deter misconduct. Sexual harassment in educational settings encompasses a range of behaviors that create a hostile environment. Research indicates that such experiences can lead to severe psychological and academic consequences for victims (Fitzgerald et al., 1995). Many *pesantrens'* remote and isolated settings may inadvertently encourage situations in which abuse continues undetected. This is particularly troubling in rural *pesantrens* where community monitoring and municipal authorities may be scarce. Students may not have many options for dealing with abuse if it occurs since they frequently do not have access to safe reporting procedures or outside assistance.

According to a study, the high level of social stigma may make the offender's attempts at normalization less successful. Sexual harassment perpetrators faced negative stigma, which acted as a form of social sanction against them, although they did not wear "religious masks." Attempts to normalize stigma failed and there was a kind of rejection of the victim-blaming mindset that has often prevailed. Sexual assault by evil religious leaders is therefore a kind of moral decay (Rahman & Maulana, 2024). Community-based initiatives that teach people about respect, personal boundaries, and reporting procedures can help in the conceptualization and resolution of sexual harassment in West Javan pesantren. A safer atmosphere for students can be achieved by policies that provide training to religious leaders and personnel on how to report and prevent sexual harassment. Additionally, several prevention techniques are suggested, such socializing and internalizing admirable moral principles, providing anti-violence counseling in pesantren, and bolstering supervision at the layer closest to the possible victims (Rahmati & Mubarak, 2023).

Pesantren frequently places a strong emphasis on religious teachings like chastity, modesty, and gender segregation, which can make it tough to confront sexual harassment openly without questioning accepted standards. Reports of harassment may be interpreted by some as a sign that the victim has failed to adhere to Islamic principles, which could result in victim-blaming (Fauz, 2023). Because of this cultural context, sexual harassment must be framed in a way that prioritizes human rights and personal responsibility without coming across as an assault on religious principles. According to the victims, the sexual harassment they endured had several effects on them, including psychological effects, educational growth, school climate, and the degree of student involvement in educational initiatives (Tari et al., 2024).

#### Islamic Principles on Justice and Accountability

Islamic principles on justice (*‘adl*) and accountability (*mas’uuliyah*) are central to the ethical, social, and legal frameworks of Islam. These principles are derived from the Qur’an and the Sunnah (teachings of Prophet Muhammad), and they emphasize fairness, equity, and personal as well as collective responsibility. Lax enforcement of policies contradicts these principles, failing to uphold the moral values *pesantrens* are expected to instill.

**Justice (*‘adl*)** in Islam means placing things in their rightful place, giving everyone their due, and upholding equity without bias or discrimination. It applies universally, transcending social, economic, or religious boundaries.

##### 1. Qur’anic Basis for Justice

###### a. Upholding Justice for All

*“Indeed, Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due and when you judge between people to judge with justice”* (Surah An-Nisa, 4:58)

###### b. Justice Without Bias

*“O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm in justice, witnesses for Allah, even if it be against yourselves or parents or relatives. Whether one is rich or*

*poor, Allah is more worthy of both”* (Surah An-Nisa, 4:135)

###### c. Justice Toward Non-Muslims

*“Allah does not forbid you from being righteous and just toward those who have not fought you because of religion and have not expelled you from your homes. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly”* (Surah Al-Mumtahanah, 60:8)

###### d. Justice is Closely Linked to Taqwa (God-consciousness)

*“Be just; that is nearer to righteousness. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is acquainted with what you do”* (Surah Al-Ma’idah, 5:8)

##### 2. Justice in Hadith

###### a. Prophet Muhammad

*“The most beloved of people to Allah on the day of judgment and the closest to Him will be the just leader”* (Sunan At-Tirmidhi, Hadith 1329)

###### b. On Impartiality

*“No judge must decide between two people while he is angry”* (Sahih Al-Bukhari, 7158)

**Accountability (*Mas’uuliyah*)** in Islam refers to the responsibility of individuals and societies for their actions with ultimate accountability before Allah on the Day of judgment.

##### 1. Qur’anic Basis for Accountability

###### a. Individual Responsibility

*“And no bearer of burdens will bear the burden of another, and if a heavily laden soul calls (another) to carry some of its load, nothing of it will be carried, even if he should be a close relative”* (Surah Fatir, 35:18)

###### b. Accountability Before Allah

*“So whoever does an atom’s weight of good will see it, and whoever does an atom’s weight of evil will see it”* (Surah Az-Zalzalah, 99:7-8)

###### c. Transparency in Deeds

*“And establish weight in justice and do not make deficient the balance”* (Surah Ar-Rahman, 55:9)

##### 2. Hadith on Accountability

###### a. Leaders are Answerable

*“Everyone of you is a shepherd, and everyone of you will be asked about his flock”* (Sahih Al-Bukhari, 893; Sahih Muslim, 1829)

###### b. Self-Reflection

*“Hold yourselves accountable before you are held accountable, and weigh your deeds before they are weighed”* (Umar ibn Al-Khattab, quoted in At-Tarmidhi).

*Pesantrens*, while providing religious and moral education, also face challenges related to cultural norms and traditional values that may influence attitudes toward gender and harassment (Intan & Maghribi, 2023). This is because *pesantrens* serve as vital institutions for religious and moral education in many Muslim-majority countries, such as Indonesia. While they aim to instill strong ethical values, including respect, discipline, and community responsibility, the cultural norms and traditional values embedded within their environments can create challenges, especially

regarding attitudes toward gender roles and harassment. Effective enforcement of harassment policies is critical in deterring misconduct. Studies suggest that clear guidelines and consistent disciplinary actions are essential for fostering a safe educational environment (Fitriyah et al., 2024). Previous studies identify cultural stigmas, lack of training for administrators, and absence of external oversight as key barriers to effectively addressing harassment in religious institutions. While there is extensive literature on sexual harassment in educational settings, limited research specifically addresses the impact of policy enforcement in *pesantrens*.

## II. RESEARCH METHODS

The dynamics of association that result in sexual harassment between old friends outside the *pesantren* and among classmates inside the *pesantren* are investigated in this study using a mixed technique. Both male and female students are the subjects and offenders of sexual harassment in this study. After watching a 20-minute film about sexual harassment, each respondent completed a prepared questionnaire to collect quantitative data. Only students who completed questionnaire number 36 were contacted for additional interviews to gather qualitative data.

The respondents were purposefully kept apart for structured and in-depth interviews since their responses to number 36 suggested that they had been sexually harassed. There is one additional group that serves as a control. They were specifically asked to complete the questionnaire twice; before and after the movie showing. The purpose was to determine whether respondents' perceptions before and after viewing a film about sexual harassment had changed. Many facets of human behavior can be investigated using a qualitative approach (Mohajan, 2018). The SEM Smart PLS 3 application was used to process quantitative data, and the NVivo 12 application was used to handle qualitative data.

Due to the largest number of sexual violence cases in Indonesia (2819 incidents in 2013), this study was carried out in West Java. Two locations were used for this study: Cimahi City, which represents traditional *pesantren*, and Tasikmalaya Regency, which represents modern *pesantren*. Given that 281 students took the poll, it can be said that the information fairly represents West Java's *pesantren* as a whole. These children, aged 15 to 18, are male and female and are enrolled in grades 10, 11, and 12. The research population, divided by region, comprises around 154,798 students. During the data collection phase, 19 *pesantren* rejected this research for a variety of reasons, such as not wanting their students to become confused and lose focus on their studies or even wanting to leave the *pesantren* because the research data collection process involved them. Research on the problem of sexual harassment in schools with religious affiliations generally faces this kind of difficulty.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Most participants reported a lack of awareness regarding the existence of sexual harassment policies, indicating a need for better communication and education. Participants noted that sanctions for harassment were often minimal or non-existent. Many victims felt discouraged from reporting incidents due to fears of retaliation or disbelief. Victims described feelings of isolation, anxiety, and a diminished sense of safety. Many reported a decline in academic performance and mental health issues as a result of their experiences. The culture within some *pesantrens* discourages open discussions about sexual harassment, perpetuating a cycle of silence and inaction.

From table 1 in general, the occurrence of physical threat, emotional and psychological damage and professional damage are more often experienced by male students. While female students often experience psychological intimidation and experience social damage.

Table 1. Experiences of gender-based sexual harassment






SEXUAL HARASSMENT	Gender	Mean Score
Physical Threat		2.04
Psychological Intimidation		2.48
Emotional and Psychological Damage		1.62
Professional Damage		1.40
Social Damage		1.38

Table 2. Perceived cessation efforts carried out by the *pesantren*








CESSATION EFFORTS	Gender	Mean Score
Policies & Procedures		4.71
Training & Education		3.41
Reporting Mechanisms		3.69
Actions & Responses		4.65
Support for Victims		3.75
Learning Culture		3.94
Evaluation & Continuous Improvement		3.23

Table 2 shows that students who pay more attention to efforts by the *pesantren* management to stop sexual

harassment are female students. They see more improvements to policies and procedures. Female students feel that there is already a policy, but it is not socialized. Training and education have been carried out once during orientation only. Training about gender and sexual violence can strengthen the mindset of students in protecting themselves from potential sexual harassment behavior (Adisti, 2022).

The reporting mechanism already exists, but it is not kept secret, causing female students hesitate to report back if

there is another incident of sexual harassment in their environment. The actions of the *pesantren* are often felt to be indecisive and the response to sexual harassment incidents is not immediate (Rahman & Maulana, 2024). Support from the *pesantren* is always available but not enough for the needs of the victims. The *pesantren* has implemented a learning culture to anticipate sexual harassment. In terms of continuous evaluation and improvement, female students feel there is no improvement.

Table 3. Path Coefficients of Direct Effects

Direct Effects	Modern	Traditional	West Java
Sexual Harassment → Damages (Impact)	0.416	-0.081	0.245
Sexual Harassment → Psychological Wellbeing	-0.151	-0.186	-0.272
Damages (Impact) → Psychological Wellbeing	0.042	-0.055	0.000
Cessation Efforts → Damages (Impact)	-0.065	-0.441	-0.023
Cessation Efforts → Psychological Wellbeing	0.247	0.697	0.605
Cessation Efforts x Sexual Harassment → Damages (Impact)	-0.102	0.120	-0.145
Cessation Efforts x Sexual Harassment → Psychological Wellbeing	-0.022	-0.008	-0.163

The data in table 3 shows the value of positive and negative coefficients which means that sexual harassment events cause emotional, psychological, professional, and social damage to students. At the same time, the incident reduced the quality of the psychological wellbeing of the students. When damage occurs, the students try to create their own psychological wellbeing. The role of the *pesantren* has been proven to have succeeded in suppressing the level of emotional, psychological, professional, and social damage of students and can improve the psychological wellbeing of its students. In addition to the need for maturity and the ability to make peace with the incidents that they have experienced, the students need to realize that the *pesantren* has succeeded in instilling positive energy for victims of sexual harassment. When efforts to stop sexual harassment are carried out immediately after the incident occurs, the damage can be suppressed, but for the students this situation cannot improve their psychological wellbeing completely.

Analysis of policy documents revealed that most *pesantrens* lack explicit guidelines for addressing sexual harassment. Disciplinary measures are often ambiguous and inconsistently applied, leading to disparities in how cases are handled. Victims reported feelings of fear, shame, and isolation, often exacerbated by victim-blaming attitudes within the *pesantren* community. Families of victims faced social ostracization, discouraging them from seeking justice. In cases where sanctions were weak or non-existent, perpetrators often remained in positions of authority, emboldening further misconduct. This perpetuated a culture of silence and impunity. Some students and parents expressed declining trust in *pesantrens'* ability to ensure safety. The lax enforcement undermined the moral authority of *pesantrens*, contradicting their mission to instill ethical values.

Though Islamic teachings unequivocally condemn injustice and harm, emphasizing accountability and the protection of vulnerable individuals, weak enforcement of harassment policies contradicts these principles and fails to comply with human rights standards.

The lax enforcement of sexual harassment policies has profound implications for victims and the broader school environment. It creates a culture where harassment is normalized and victims are left without recourse. The *pesantrens* have to establish clear, comprehensive guidelines for addressing sexual harassment. Ensure sanctions are consistent, transparent, and proportional to the offense. The *pesantrens'* management should train administrators and staff on recognizing and addressing harassment, and develop awareness programs for students and parents about their rights.

*Pesantrens* should foster a supportive environment for victims to report incidents without fear of retaliation. They should also engage religious leaders to promote a culture of accountability based on Islamic principles. *Pesantrens* nowadays have an independent body to monitor compliance with harassment policies, namely *satgas* PPKS (*Satuan Tugas Pencegahan dan Penanganan Kekerasan Seksual*) or a task force for the prevention and handling of sexual violence. *Pesantrens* have to introduce mechanisms for victims to seek redress outside *pesantrens*.

Therefore, *pesantrens* should (1) develop comprehensive sexual harassment policies that are communicated effectively to all students and staff; (2) implement training programs for staff and students on recognizing and addressing harassment; (3) establish confidential reporting mechanisms and support services for victims, ensuring they feel safe and supported.

It is possible to heal from sexual harassment trauma at least three months after the encounter if appropriate



techniques are used. According to (Dworkin et al., 2018), the sufferer undergoes extremely acute trauma during the first and second months. To address the mental health of their students, certain *pesantrens* with more serious abuse situations adopt psychoeducation (Hamid et al., 2024). A victim's redemptive trauma narrative can aid in psychological healing (Delker et al., 2020). The idea of redemption, which arises when a challenging, unpleasant, or traumatic event is recounted in a way that communicates progress, meaning-making, or resolution, is the most widely held concept in the field of narrative identity. According to a study, in order to stop harassment and violence, *pesantren* should improve the pedagogical abilities of senior *santri* in caring for junior *santri* (Yaqin et al., 2024).

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

The lack of firmness in enforcing sexual harassment policies in Islamic boarding schools has far-reaching consequences, including psychological harm to victims, impunity for perpetrators, and erosion of institutional trust. By adopting clear policies, building capacity, and aligning disciplinary measures with Islamic and legal frameworks, *pesantrens* can create safer environments and uphold their moral mission. This study highlights the critical need for *pesantrens* to strengthen their enforcement of sexual harassment policies. By doing so, they can create a safer, more supportive educational environment that promotes the well-being of all students.

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