Gender-Based Violence in Higher Education: Awareness and Practices

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Abstract. Gender-based violence (GBV) often goes unnoticed in education, including higher education. This research aims to explore the level of awareness among academic communities, particularly university leadership, and to identify academic practices that may constitute or enable GBV at two Indonesian universities. University X, a legal entity university on Java Island, and University Y, a non-legal entity university on Sumatra Island, were selected. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with university leaders, gender study centers, and sexual violence prevention task forces, while secondary data came from institutional records and reports. The findings reveal a complex relationship between awareness, academic practices, and institutional responses to GBV. While both universities show signs of progress in addressing GBV, significant gaps remain, particularly in awareness levels, prevention measures, and response mechanisms. Effective handling of GBV requires a holistic approach, combining targeted awareness campaigns, comprehensive victim support systems, and reforms in academic practices. University leadership has a vital role in shaping a culture of accountability, inclusivity, and safety to ensure that GBV is not only addressed but actively prevented within academic environments.

Keywords: Academic community; awareness, gender; campus, sexual violence.

1 Introduction

The issue of sexual violence in higher education institutions is often described as an iceberg phenomenon, where the reported cases represent only a small fraction of the actual incidents that occur, as the majority of cases remain hidden below the surface and go unreported. Gender-based violence, including sexual harassment and assault, is a significant problem in these environments, affecting both students and faculty [1]. While academic spaces are often considered to be more progressive and aware, the prevalence of such violence within these settings is a concerning reality that needs to be urgently addressed to create safer, more supportive, and more equitable academic communities for all [2].

Studies indicate that a significant portion, approximately 30 percent, of the academic community, including both students and faculty, have reported experiencing some form of gender-based violence, such as sexual harassment or assault, both in verbal and physical manifestations [3]. The survivors of such traumatic incidents often face numerous barriers when it comes to reporting these events and subsequently accessing the necessary support and resources, leading to chronic underreporting and the perpetuation of this critical problem. Developing a comprehensive understanding of the full prevalence, level of awareness, and existing institutional practices surrounding gender-based violence in higher education settings is crucial to inform the development and implementation of effective interventions, as well as robust policies, that aim to create safer, more supportive, and more equitable academic environments for all members of the community.

According to Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Regulation No. 30 of 2021, every university should establish a dedicated task force responsible for the prevention and effective handling of all incidents of gender-based violence. This task force should be empowered to develop and implement comprehensive policies, procedures, and training programs to address this critical issue. All members of the university community, including students, faculty, and staff, should be required to undergo regular, mandatory training on gender-based violence, its prevention, and the range of available support services and reporting mechanisms. This training should be implemented at intervals no longer than 12 months to ensure all members of the community are informed and equipped to recognize, respond to, and help address gender-based violence effectively.

However, it appears that, within the past three years, not all universities have been able to effectively implement this regulation. Nevertheless, the prevalence of gender-based violence in higher education and the associated institutional practices and levels of awareness to address this critical issue remain unclear. This research study aims to investigate the current state of gender-based violence in higher education, including the prevalence of such incidents, the level of awareness among the academic community, and the institutional practices and policies that have been implemented to prevent and respond to these issues.

Based on the background described above, this study seeks to investigate the following research questions: How aware are members of the academic community about the issue of sexual violence on campus? What practices are in place to prevent and address sexual violence within the campus environment? Additionally, this study aims to analyze the level of awareness among the academic community and examine the effectiveness of the practices employed to prevent and handle sexual violence on campus.

2 Methods

This research used a quantitative approach to investigate the research questions. The study selected two universities for investigation: University X (PT X), which represents Java Island, and University Y (PT Y), which is located on Sumatra Island. The primary data collection involved in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, including university leadership, representatives from gender studies centers, and members of sexual violence prevention and response task forces. Additionally, the researchers sourced secondary data from written records and reports provided by each university.

The data collected through interviews and secondary sources were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key themes and patterns related to the prevalence of gender-based violence, levels of awareness, and institutional practices. The study also conducted a survey with a sample of 169 respondent from students and staff from each university to assess their awareness and experiences regarding gender-based violence on campus. Respondents were aged between 17-66 years, 64 percent were in the 17-30 year age group, 53 percent were undergraduate students, and 65 percent were female.

The survey instrument was developed based on the literature review and input from subject matter experts. It included questions on the respondents' awareness of policies and reporting mechanisms, their personal experiences with gender-based violence, and their perceptions of the university's response and support services.

3 Results

The study involved respondents from the academic community, including lecturers, education staff, and students. A total of 169 respondents from the two universities participated. The respondents at University X tended to be older on average compared to those at University Y. This can be attributed to the larger proportion of postgraduate students at University X, who are generally older than the undergraduate students at University Y. Referring to Brown et al. [4], awareness of sexual violence tends to increase along with cognitive and emotional development. During adolescence and young adulthood, critical thinking skills and understanding of social issues, including sexual violence, become more developed. This awareness often stems from formal education, media exposure, and deeper social conversations about such issues.

According to Table 1, the number of sexual violence cases experienced by respondents at PTN X was 206 cases, while at PTN Y, there were 81 cases. In terms of the types of sexual violence, there was a pattern of similarity in the most frequently experienced cases. The five most common types of sexual violence, in order, are: (1) receiving remarks containing sexual advances, jokes, and/or whistles without the victim's consent; (2) receiving messages, jokes, images, photos, audio, and/or videos with sexual content; (3) receiving comments that discriminate against or harass the victim's physical appearance, body condition, and/or gender identity; (4) receiving sexually suggestive stares or those that make the victim feel uncomfortable; and (5) being touched, stroked, groped, held, hugged, kissed, or having the perpetrator's body parts rubbed against the victim's body without the victim's consent.

The high prevalence of verbal sexual harassment and cyber-sexual assault indicates that these types of sexual violence are the most common forms experienced by respondents in both universities. This aligns with the findings from previous studies, which have also identified verbal harassment and cyber-sexual violence as prevalent forms of gender-based violence in higher education institutions [5], [6]. The findings further suggest that the academic community, particularly students, is aware of the various types of sexual violence and has experienced them in their daily lives, either directly or indirectly.

Table 1. The number of sexual violence cases experienced by respondents at PT X and PT Y

Sexual violence experienced by the respondent	PT X	PT Y	Total
1. Never experienced	67	31	98
2. Received discriminatory or degrading remarks about physical appearance, body condition, and/or the victim's gender identity.	23	7	30
3. Someone else intentionally displayed their genitals without the victim's consent.	12	5	17
4. Received comments containing flirtation, jokes, and/or sexual whistling without the victim's consent.	28	7	35
5. Received sexualized gazes and/or made the victim feel uncomfortable.	14	5	19
6. Received messages, jokes, images, photos, audio, and/or videos with sexual connotations directed at the victim despite being prohibited by the victim.	36	13	49
7. Existence of sexualized photos, audio recordings, and/or videos of the victim taken, recorded, edited, and/or distributed without the victim's consent.	2	1	3
8. Existence of sexualized body photos and/or information belonging to the victim uploaded without the victim's consent.	1	1	2
9. Existence of the dissemination of information related to the victim's intimate body parts without the victim's consent.	1		1
10. Intentionally being spied on while engaging in personal activities and/or in a private space.	4	1	5
11. Being coaxed, promised, offered something, and/or threatened to engage in sexual transactions or activities not approved by the victim.	1	2	3
12. Receiving punishments or sanctions with sexual undertones.	1		1
13. Being touched, stroked, groped, held, hugged, kissed, and/or having body parts rubbed against the victim's body without the victim's consent.	13	4	17
14. Having the victim's clothing removed without the victim's consent.		1	1
15. Being forced to engage in sexual transactions or activities.	2	2	4
16. Becoming a victim of attempted rape with or without penetration.	1	1	2
Total	206	81	287

The Figure 1 illustrates the responses to sexual violence cases on campuses PT X and PT Y. The most dominant response at PT X is supporting victims in obtaining their rights, with a significantly higher number compared to PT Y. Additionally, PT X also shows a greater number of people assisting in reporting cases to external authorities and providing advice to victims. However, the number of individuals who choose to remain silent is higher at PT Y compared to PT X, indicating that more people at PT Y opt not to take action or get involved in helping the victims. Responses that reflect victim-blaming attitudes are relatively small in both campuses, suggesting that stigma against victims is not highly prevalent. Other categories, such as not knowing what to do, discussing the case with friends, or other responses, also have low numbers in both campuses. Overall, PT X appears to be more proactive in supporting victims and reporting cases, whereas PT Y needs to improve awareness and active support for victims of sexual violence.

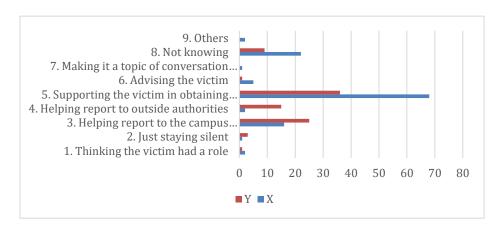


Figure 1. Response to the sexual violence in campus of PT X and PT Y

The Figure 2 illustrates the reasons for not reporting sexual violence at PT X and PT Y. The most prominent reason at PT Y is the lack of knowledge about where to report, which is significantly higher compared to PT X. This indicates the need for better dissemination of information regarding reporting mechanisms at PT Y. Fear of not being believed is another common concern at both institutions, reflecting a widespread fear that their reports will not be taken seriously. At PT Y, a higher number of respondents are afraid of tarnishing their family's reputation or being perceived as damaging the institution's reputation, highlighting greater societal pressure in this context. Meanwhile, at PT X, a significant number of respondents expressed fear of being expelled from campus as a reason for not reporting. Fear of retaliation from the perpetrator is one of the major reasons in both institutions, with PT Y showing slightly higher numbers. Feeling sorry for the perpetrator and the belief that the victim only needs psychological support are less common reasons, though PT X records slightly higher numbers in the latter category. Lastly, a small number of respondents at both institutions reported having no specific reason or cited other reasons for not reporting. Overall, PT Y faces more barriers related to lack of awareness and social pressures, while PT X exhibits more concern over personal consequences such as expulsion. Both institutions highlight the need for creating a safer and more supportive environment for reporting sexual violence cases. this finding in line with previous studies that identified barriers to reporting sexual violence, such as lack of knowledge, fear of not being believed, and social stigma [7]-[9].

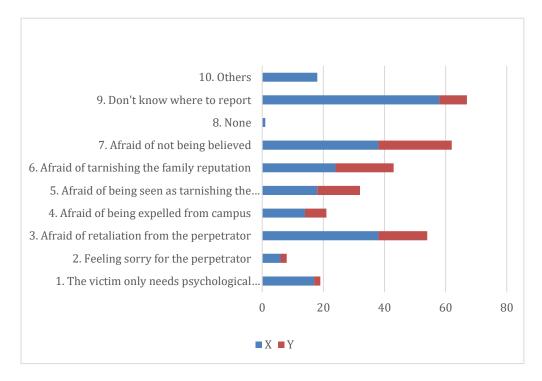


Figure 2. Reasons for not reporting sexual violence in campus of PT X and PT Y

The Figure 3 illustrates the reporting agencies chosen for sexual violence cases at PT X and PT Y. A striking finding is the high level of uncertainty among students at PT Y, with "Not sure"

being the most dominant response, significantly higher than at PT X. This indicates a lack of awareness or information about reporting mechanisms at PT Y. Meanwhile, the "Special Task Force for Sexual Violence (Satgas PPKS)" stands out as a popular choice at both campuses, reflecting trust in this agency's ability to handle sexual violence cases. Reporting to mass media has very low numbers in both PT X and PT Y, likely due to concerns over privacy and potential social repercussions. Additionally, reporting to academic leaders, such as faculty, study program, or university leadership, is relatively low, particularly at PT X, suggesting these institutions may not be perceived as effective or supportive enough by victims. Other agencies, like the "Psychology Service Center" and "Women's/Gender Studies Center," also have low reporting numbers, indicating their potential as support systems is underutilized. Few respondents chose "Others," showing a preference for formal and recognized agencies. Overall, the data highlights the need for PT Y to improve awareness of reporting mechanisms and for both campuses to strengthen the roles of other supportive institutions, providing victims with more accessible and trusted options, this finding in line with previous studies which have identified barriers to reporting sexual violence, such as lack of awareness of reporting mechanisms, distrust in institutional responses, and the need for more comprehensive and accessible support services for victims [8], [10], [11].

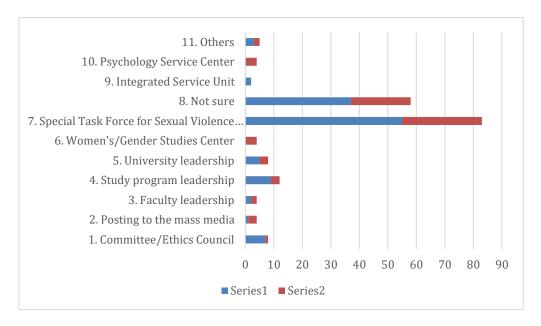


Figure 3. Reporting Agency (Who to report sexual violence on campus to?)

Figure 4 illustrates various practices for preventing and handling sexual violence at PT X and PT Y. One notable finding is that PT Y shows a higher number of cases categorized as "No follow-up handling," indicating potential weaknesses in the responsiveness of its system. In contrast, PT X demonstrates greater efforts in explaining the handling process to victims and providing recovery programs, suggesting a more active approach to supporting victims. Both campuses show similar levels in explaining the selection of recovery services, which implies a consistent effort in this area. PT X slightly outperforms PT Y in restoring the reputation of

victims, emphasizing its focus on assisting victims in rebuilding their standing after incidents. Interestingly, PT Y records higher numbers in receiving reports, which might indicate a more utilized reporting mechanism at the campus. However, PT X appears more transparent regarding sanctions for perpetrators and shows a stronger commitment to offering support services such as counseling and guidance. PT Y, on the other hand, has higher numbers for security protection, reflecting a focus on preventing further risks for victims. Financial assistance is notably low at both campuses, indicating a lack of prioritization in providing financial aid to victims as part of the recovery process. Additionally, the "Others" category remains minimal at both campuses, suggesting that most practices are well-defined within the given categories. Overall, PT X appears more proactive in offering support and recovery services, while PT Y demonstrates strength in receiving reports and providing security. However, the high number of cases with "No follow-up handling" at PT Y calls for an evaluation of its case resolution processes, and both campuses need to improve financial assistance and other forms of victim support.

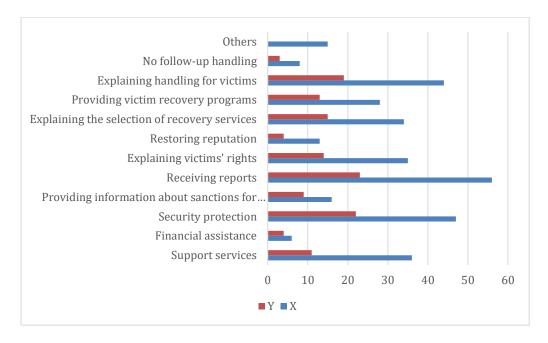


Figure 4. Practices for the prevention and handling of sexual violence

The Figure 5 highlights various practices for preventing and handling sexual violence at PT X and PT Y, revealing several notable findings. One concerning aspect is the significantly higher number of "No follow-up handling" cases at PT Y, indicating that many reports are not adequately addressed, which reflects a major weakness in the handling mechanism at this campus. In contrast, PT X excels in providing explanations about handling processes for victims and offering recovery programs, showcasing a more proactive approach to supporting victims. PT Y, however, shows higher numbers in receiving reports, suggesting that its reporting system is more utilized or prioritized. Additionally, PT Y also outperforms PT X in providing security protection, reflecting a stronger focus on preventing further risks for victims after an incident.

PT X demonstrates greater transparency in providing information about sanctions for perpetrators and takes a stronger role in helping victims restore their reputations, indicating a commitment to supporting the social recovery of victims. Both campuses show relatively low numbers for financial assistance, highlighting a lack of prioritization for this type of support. PT X also leads in offering support services, such as counseling or guidance, further emphasizing its comprehensive approach to victim care. Lastly, the "Others" category has minimal responses, suggesting that most practices are well captured within the predefined categories. Overall, PT X is more focused on direct victim support and recovery, while PT Y emphasizes receiving reports and providing security. However, the high number of "No follow-up handling" cases at PT Y underscores the need for significant improvements in resolving cases effectively at this campus. Both institutions would benefit from enhancing financial aid and expanding their support systems for victims.

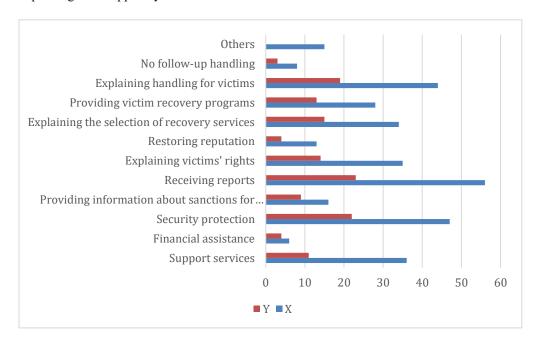


Figure 5. Practices for the prevention and handling of sexual violence

The Figure 6 highlights the various services provided by PT X and PT Y in handling cases of sexual violence, revealing several key findings. PT X demonstrates stronger performance in several areas, such as providing accompaniment services, victim recovery programs, information on sanctions for perpetrators, and explanations of the case handling process. These findings suggest that PT X has a more structured and transparent approach to supporting victims compared to PT Y. Furthermore, PT X excels in helping victims restore their reputations, showcasing its commitment to assisting them in regaining their social standing after incidents. On the other hand, PT Y shows notable strengths in receiving reports and providing security protection, indicating that its systems are more focused on initial reporting mechanisms and ensuring victims' safety. However, PT Y records significantly higher numbers in the "No follow-up action taken" category, pointing to a major weakness in resolving cases and

addressing reports effectively. Both institutions show very low scores in providing financial assistance to victims, suggesting that this aspect of support is not prioritized in either campus. Overall, while PT X excels in comprehensive victim support and recovery services, PT Y needs significant improvements in follow-up actions and expanding its services beyond report reception and security measures. Both campuses would benefit from increasing financial assistance and ensuring more consistent support for victims. According previous study, providing comprehensive services and support for victims is crucial in addressing sexual violence cases on campuses [12].

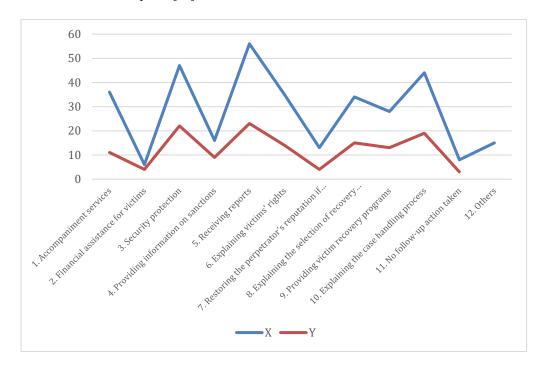


Figure 6. Services provided by university PT X and PT Y

The Figure 7 illustrates the approaches used by PT X and PT Y to prevent sexual violence, revealing several key findings. Seminars emerge as the most prominent method in both universities, particularly at PT X, where they are significantly more dominant than other approaches. This suggests that seminars are the primary choice for raising awareness and promoting sexual violence prevention. Lectures are another popular approach at PT X, indicating that formal education is utilized as a crucial component in their prevention strategy. However, the socialization of rules at the faculty level shows very low numbers in both universities, highlighting a gap in localized policy-based prevention efforts.

A notable finding is the relatively high number of students in the "Not sure" category, especially at PT Y, suggesting that many students are unaware of the preventive approaches being implemented by their campus. Meanwhile, creative and participatory methods, such as training, research topics, art and music events, and community service topics, receive low attention in both universities. This indicates that these innovative approaches are underutilized in sexual violence prevention. Additionally, the socialization conducted by student commissions also

shows low numbers, reflecting limited engagement of students as active agents of change in these efforts.

In summary, seminars and lectures are the primary prevention methods adopted by PT X and PT Y, with PT X showing stronger emphasis on these approaches. However, the lack of focus on faculty-level rule dissemination, creative approaches, and student-led initiatives presents opportunities for improvement. The significant level of uncertainty among students at PT Y also underscores the need for more intensive and clearer socialization of the prevention strategies implemented by the university. According to previous research, a comprehensive and multifaceted approach, including both formal and informal methods, is crucial for effective sexual violence prevention on campus [7], [13], [14].

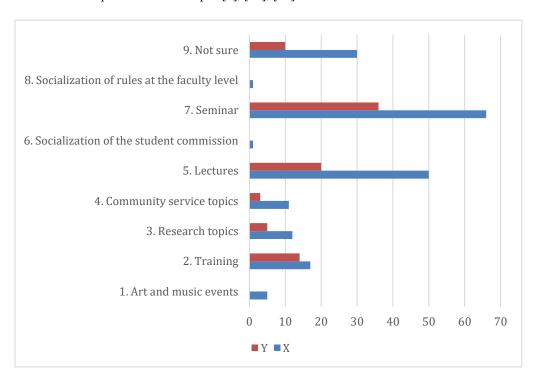


Figure 7. Approach to preventing sexual violence by university PT X and PT Y

The Figure 8 shows the services provided by the "Satgas PPKS" (Task Force for the Prevention and Handling of Sexual Violence) at PT X and PT Y, revealing several key findings. Reporting emerges as the most prominent service at PT Y, with significantly higher numbers compared to PT X. This indicates that PT Y's task force primarily serves as a platform for receiving reports. On the other hand, PT X shows a stronger emphasis on victim recovery services, demonstrating a focus on providing post-incident support, such as psychological or social recovery. Accompaniment services are relatively balanced between the two universities, though PT X has a slight edge, suggesting that both institutions recognize the importance of supporting victims throughout the process.

In terms of administrative sanctions for perpetrators, PT X records slightly higher numbers, reflecting a stronger commitment to holding perpetrators accountable. However, a notable

concern is the high number of "Don't know" responses, particularly at PT Y, which indicates that many students or community members are unaware of the services provided by the task force. This points to a need for better communication and outreach efforts, especially at PT Y. In summary, while PT Y excels in facilitating reporting, PT X places greater emphasis on victim recovery, accompaniment, and sanctions for perpetrators. The high level of uncertainty in PT Y regarding available services underscores the need for more effective socialization to ensure that all members of the campus community are aware of and can access these critical resources. Both institutions could benefit from balancing their services to provide comprehensive support for victims and ensure effective enforcement against perpetrators. In line with study from Alpian [15] and literature on best practices, a holistic approach addressing all aspects of sexual violence prevention and response is crucial for creating a safer campus environment. According with study that Task Force for the Prevention and Handling of Sexual Violence can plays a significant role in addressing this issue on campuses [16], [17].

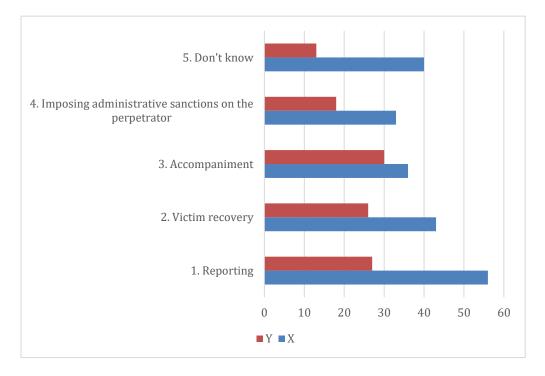


Figure 8. Services of the task force for the prevention and handling of sexual violence "Satgas PPKS" in University PT X and PT Y

4 Discussion

The findings from this study highlight critical insights into the complex and multifaceted issue of gender-based violence awareness, experiences, and practices in higher education institutions. These insights have significant implications for policy development and institutional responses

aimed at addressing this pressing concern. The study provides a comprehensive understanding of the prevalence, forms, and dynamics of gender-based violence within the academic setting, underscoring the urgent need for tailored interventions and comprehensive strategies to create safer and more inclusive campus environments.

The study reveals a disturbingly high prevalence of sexual violence, with 169 cases reported across the two universities, spanning various locations beyond the campus. The most common forms of violence—verbal harassment, cyber-sexual violence, and physical harassment—reflect patterns consistent with previous studies [5], [6]. The findings underscore the need for interventions addressing these pervasive forms of violence, particularly through digital literacy and safe reporting mechanisms to combat cyber-sexual violence.

A comparative analysis of responses to sexual violence at PT X and PT Y highlights significant disparities in institutional practices. PT X demonstrates a more proactive approach, with a higher focus on supporting victims in obtaining their rights and assisting with external reporting, while PT Y shows a higher proportion of individuals choosing to remain silent or unsure about reporting mechanisms. These findings mirror prior studies [7], [18] emphasizing the importance of institutional responses in fostering victim trust and participation. Both universities need to strengthen their communication strategies, ensuring clarity around reporting mechanisms and actively combating victim-blaming attitudes. The barriers to reporting further reflect a lack of trust in institutional processes, particularly at PT Y, where the dominant reasons include not knowing where to report and fear of societal judgment or institutional damage. These align with established barriers such as lack of awareness, fear of retaliation, and social stigma [8], [9]. Addressing these barriers requires tailored interventions that build trust in the institution, guarantee anonymity and confidentiality, and dismantle harmful social norms that discourage reporting.

Preventive measures vary significantly between PT X and PT Y, with PT X emphasizing structured methods such as seminars, lectures, and victim recovery programs. In contrast, PT Y shows a higher focus on receiving reports and providing security measures. The prevalence of "No follow-up handling" cases at PT Y highlights a critical gap in resolving reports, reflecting a need for procedural accountability. Both campuses exhibit low engagement in innovative approaches such as art events, research, and community involvement, which could enhance awareness and participation through creative and participatory strategies [13], [14].

The role of the "Satgas PPKS" task force demonstrates key differences between the universities. PT Y excels in facilitating reporting but struggles with awareness and follow-up actions, as reflected in the high "Don't know" responses. PT X, on the other hand, leads in victim recovery, accompaniment services, and imposing sanctions on perpetrators, highlighting its structured and transparent approach to victim support. These findings align with prior studies emphasizing the critical role of task forces in addressing GBV on campuses [16], [17]. Strengthening task force outreach and expanding its services to ensure comprehensive victim care, accountability, and institutional trust is essential.

Overall, this study underscores the importance of a multifaceted approach to addressing GBV in higher education. Universities must adopt a holistic framework encompassing prevention, reporting, victim support, and accountability to create safer campus environments. Targeted awareness campaigns, tailored to diverse demographic groups, are essential for fostering a culture of safety and trust. Furthermore, institutional policies must emphasize transparency, accessibility, and inclusivity to ensure that all members of the academic community are equipped to address GBV effectively. These findings reinforce the need for coordinated efforts between universities, task forces, and broader societal institutions to eradicate GBV and uphold the dignity and safety of all individuals on campus.

5 Conclusion

This study highlights critical findings regarding gender-based violence (GBV) in two universities. A total of 287 cases were reported, both on-campus and off-campus, with verbal harassment, cyber-sexual violence, and physical harassment as the most prevalent forms, emphasizing how GBV is deeply embedded in daily interactions. Barriers to addressing GBV were significant, with PT Y facing issues such as lack of awareness about reporting mechanisms and fear of societal judgment, while PT X faced fears of institutional retaliation. High levels of "silent" or "unsure" responses underscore the need for improved communication and trust-building in both institutions.

Academic practices revealed varied responsiveness, with PT X focusing on victim recovery, accompaniment services, and transparent sanctions, while PT Y prioritized receiving reports and security protection but showed significant weaknesses in follow-up actions. Both universities underutilized innovative prevention methods, such as community engagement and participatory approaches. The "Satgas PPKS" task forces played a vital role but exhibited gaps in communication and community engagement, particularly at PT Y.

Addressing GBV in these universities requires a holistic approach that integrates awareness campaigns, comprehensive victim support, and systemic improvements in prevention and response mechanisms. University leadership and task forces must strengthen their roles to foster a culture of accountability and safety, ensuring GBV is effectively addressed and prevented.

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