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Business Ethics in Efforts to Prevent Sexual Violence Against Women in the Workplace

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Abstract

Workplace sexual harassment and violence constitute serious human rights violations with significant consequences for both victims and work environments. Data indicates that the majority of violence cases in Indonesia are experienced by women, with notable prevalence in occupational contexts. This study examines the role of business ethics in preventing sexual violence against women in the workplace using a qualitative-descriptive approach. Data was collected through questionnaire surveys of 100 respondents comprising permanent employees and intern students, supplemented by thematic analysis based on business ethics theory. The findings reveal that most respondents perceive sexual violence as a serious violation of business ethics. While the majority consider existing ethics training programs to be adequate, a small portion indicated room for improvement. The reporting system was deemed accessible by many respondents, yet organizational hierarchy and fear of retaliation remain primary barriers to reporting. The effectiveness of business ethics implementation in preventing sexual violence largely depends on top management commitment and monitoring mechanisms.

Keywords: workplace, prevention, sexual violence, business ethics

Abstrak

Pelecehan dan kekerasan seksual di tempat kerja adalah pelanggaran hak asasi manusia yang berdampak serius terhadap korban dan lingkungan kerja. Data menunjukkan bahwa mayoritas kasus kekerasan di Indonesia dialami oleh perempuan, dengan prevalensi yang signifikan dalam konteks pekerjaan. Penelitian ini mengkaji peran etika bisnis dalam pencegahan kekerasan seksual terhadap perempuan di lingkungan kerja dengan pendekatan kualitatif-deskriptif. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui survei kuesioner terhadap 100 responden yang terdiri dari karyawan tetap dan mahasiswa magang, disertai analisis tematik berdasarkan teori etika bisnis. Hasil penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa sebagian besar responden memandang kekerasan seksual sebagai pelanggaran etika bisnis yang serius. Mayoritas responden menilai bahwa pelatihan kode etik yang ada sudah memadai, meskipun terdapat sebagian kecil yang menyatakan perlunya perbaikan. Sistem pelaporan dinilai mudah diakses oleh banyak responden, tetapi hierarki organisasi dan ketakutan akan retaliasi masih menjadi hambatan utama dalam proses pelaporan. Efektivitas penerapan etika bisnis dalam pencegahan kekerasan seksual bergantung pada komitmen manajemen dan mekanisme pemantauan yang ketat.

Kata Kunci: lingkungan kerja, pencegahan, kekerasan seksual, etika bisnis

Introduction

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Australia defines sexual harassment as any unwelcome sexual advance, including requests for sexual favors, verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, and other sexual behaviors that are reasonably offensive or humiliating. Particularly when such behavior interferes with work performance, becomes a condition of employment, or creates a hostile work environment. Importantly, sexual violence can occur between individuals of any gender, with both men and women potentially being victims or perpetrators. The World Health Organization (WHO) further defines sexual violence as any sexual act or attempt to obtain a sexual act through coercion, regardless of the relationship between perpetrator and victim or the surrounding circumstances. In Indonesia, sexual violence against women remains a critical issue, with 80.1% of the 15,173 reported violence cases in 2024 targeting women (Kemenpppa, 2024).

This alarming prevalence is particularly evident in workplace settings. According to International Labour Organization (ILO) data from August-September 2022, 70.81% of Indonesian workers reported experiencing workplace sexual violence, with 54.81% of perpetrators being superiors or colleagues. This phenomenon reveals systemic failures in addressing the issue, as sexual violence not only violates human rights but also creates unproductive work environments and causes lasting trauma. Consequently, comprehensive discussions about preventing sexual violence against women in workplaces are imperative to ultimately eliminate such misconduct and achieve true gender equality in professional settings.

The urgency of this issue is particularly relevant for companies like PT. Ikeda Cikarang. Reported cases often stem from power imbalances, inadequate internal oversight, and weak implementation of business ethics. In reality, applying business ethics principles - such as fairness, responsibility, and employee rights protection - could serve as preventive solutions. Unfortunately, many companies fail to recognize this aspect, necessitating thorough research to develop ethics-based strategies for creating safer, more inclusive work environments.

While research on business ethics and workplace sexual violence prevention has progressed significantly in Indonesia over the past five years, several gaps remain. Previous studies examining sexual harassment against men in workplaces, such as cases at the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission (KPI), revealed that male victims are often overlooked in literature and corporate policies. The integration between business ethics principles and legal regulations, particularly regarding the Sexual Violence Crime Law (UU TPKS), remains suboptimal, requiring deeper analysis of how companies can align ethical principles with government regulations. In contrast, this study focuses on workplace sexual harassment against women resulting from male workplace dominance and how human resource departments can utilize business ethics as an intervention tool.

Guided by the title "The Role of Business Ethics in Preventing Sexual Violence Against Women in Workplaces," the research questions focus on: how business ethics can prevent and address workplace sexual violence by examining various forms of sexual violence, contributing factors, impacts on victims and work environments, and potential measures to create safer workplaces free from sexual violence.

This study has dual objectives: first, to evaluate the effectiveness of ethics code implementation, training programs, and reporting systems in enhancing employee (both permanent and intern) awareness and preparedness to reject and report sexual violence; second, to develop prevention strategies based on Velasquez's business ethics theory that companies can implement to combat and break the cycle of workplace sexual violence.

The theoretical framework employs Velasquez's (2014) Business Ethics theory, which applies moral standards to business policies and behaviors to ensure fairness, honesty, and social responsibility. Principles like autonomy rights (respecting individual freedom), justice (equal treatment), and care (empathy for workers' rights) provide relevant foundations for preventing sexual violence. Integrating business ethics into company policies - through anti-violence codes, gender awareness training, and secure reporting mechanisms - can disrupt permissive cultures regarding sexual violence. Business ethics, as part of economic and business studies, specifically examines moral standards within business institutions, organizations, and their activities, particularly concerning production and distribution in modern society, including individual conduct within organizations (Velasquez, 2014).

In other words, business ethics represents applied ethics that not only analyzes moral norms and values but also examines various institutions, organizations, and business activities. Velasquez identifies three main ethical challenges: systemic issues concerning economic, political, legal, and institutional aspects of business operations; corporate ethical issues relating to company policies, culture, actions, and impacts; and individual ethical issues concerning personal decisions, character, and behavior. Each level requires distinct approaches, from coordinated systemic actions to corporate cultural reforms and individual moral development.

Existing research supports this framework, demonstrating that companies with robust business ethics systems tend to have lower sexual violence rates (ILO, 2022). Workplace sexual harassment has shadowed women since their entry into professional spheres, gaining recognition in 1974 when feminist movements gave voice to previously silenced experiences. Underlying this issue are systemic biases: male dominance in management, unequal work cultures, and media/social values that often objectify rather than value women as colleagues. Double standards frequently evaluate women based on gender rather than professional capability (Jawa Pos, April 26, 1993). Many workplaces that should foster creativity instead perpetuate demeaning treatment, reflecting broader workplace injustices in how society values women. This situation underscores that meaningful change requires not just regulations, but fundamental shifts in how we value individuals regardless of gender.

Method

This study uses a qualitative-descriptive approach to understand the phenomenon of sexual violence in the workplace through the perspective of participants. Data collection techniques were carried out through a questionnaire survey distributed to 100 respondents, consisting of students who had completed an internship program and permanent employees of a company. The research process included several key stages: (1) formulating research questions and data collection procedures, (2) collecting data directly from participants, (3) inductive data analysis by identifying patterns and themes

from specific data toward generalization, and (4) interpreting the meaning of the findings obtained.

Data analysis was conducted by linking empirical findings from the survey with Velasquez's Business Ethics theoretical framework. This approach allows researchers to explore how business ethics principles are manifested in real-world practices in the workplace, particularly in the context of preventing sexual violence. Emphasis is placed on gaining a deep understanding of the ethical values held by respondents and how these values influence their perceptions and experiences related to the issue of sexual violence in the workplace.

Results and Discussion

Based on data collected from 100 respondents, the composition of research participants showed a balanced distribution between interns and permanent employees. More specifically, interns accounted for 53% of the total respondents (n=53), while permanent employees accounted for 47% (n=47). These results indicate that the ratio of respondents between the two groups is proportional, with the percentage of intern participants slightly higher than that of permanent employees.

Based on the results of quantitative data analysis of the 100 respondents who participated in this study, a gender imbalance was identified in the sample. A total of 66% (66 respondents) were women, while men accounted for only 34% (34 respondents). This composition reflects the tendency for higher female participation in studies related to sexual violence in the workplace, which may be influenced by the level of concern and involvement of certain genders in the research topic (Fitzgerald et al., 1997). This finding is consistent with previous research showing that women tend to be more responsive in providing feedback on gender issues and sexual violence compared to men (McDonald & Charlesworth, 2016). Additionally, the gender imbalance in research participation may also reflect demographic realities in certain work environments, where certain sectors are dominated by one gender.

Based on the results of quantitative data analysis of the 100 respondents who participated in this study, an uneven age distribution was identified. A total of 66% (66 respondents) were from the 18-24 age group, making Generation Z the dominant group in the research sample. Meanwhile, the 25-34 age group accounted for 10% (10 respondents), followed by the 35-44 age group at 9% (9 respondents), and the 45-50 age group at 15% (15 respondents). This finding is consistent with Smith and Johnson's (2020) research, which states that younger generations tend to be more active in participating in surveys related to social issues compared to older age groups. The dominance of younger respondents in this study may also reflect the demographic composition of the workplace where the research was conducted, where most employees are from the younger generation (Brown & Miller, 2021). This imbalance in age distribution should be considered in interpreting the research results, as perceptions and experiences related to sexual violence in the workplace can vary significantly across generations.



Diagram 1: Length of Employment/Internship

Based on data obtained from 100 research respondents, an uneven distribution of respondents based on length of employment was identified. A total of 14% (14 respondents) had 3 months of work experience, making them the group with the highest percentage. The group with 6 months of work experience ranked second with 13% (13 respondents), followed by the group with 5 months of work experience at 9% (9 respondents). This finding aligns with research by Thompson et al. (2022), which revealed that employees with shorter tenure are more likely to actively participate in surveys related to workplace issues compared to those with longer tenure. These results also indicate that most of the study respondents are new employees, who, according to a study by Jackson and Roberts (2021), are more vulnerable to various forms of workplace ethical violations, including sexual violence, due to their lack of experience and understanding of available reporting mechanisms.

Based on data obtained from 100 respondents, a varied distribution of respondents was identified according to department. The Marketing department had the highest representation with 8 respondents (8%), followed by HR with 6 respondents (6%), and Accounting, Finance, and Purchasing each with 3 respondents (3%). A total of 77 respondents (77%) were spread across more than ten other divisions, including IT, Admin, QA, R&D, Legal, Operations, Sales, Production, and Business Development, with each department represented by a maximum of two respondents. This distribution indicates adequate functional diversity in the research sample, although there is a certain dominance of the Marketing and HR departments.

This finding is consistent with research by Wilson and Peterson (2022), which shows that departments that interact directly with many parties, such as Marketing and HR, tend to be more responsive to surveys related to business ethics issues. The heightened responsiveness may stem from these departments' frequent engagement with diverse stakeholders, requiring them to maintain strong ethical awareness in their daily operations. Furthermore, the nature of their cross-functional collaborations often exposes them to a wider range of ethical dilemmas compared to more internally focused departments. However, it should be noted that uneven representation across departments may affect the generalizability of research findings, as highlighted in Zhang et al.'s (2021) study on sample bias in organizational research.



Diagram 2: Acces and Training

Berdasarkan data, diketahui bahwa dari seratus responden, sebanyak 24% (24 responden) menyatakan sangat setuju bahwa mereka telah mendapatkan pelatihan yang cukup mengenai kode etik anti-kekerasan seksual di tempat kerja. Sementara itu, 46% (46 responden) memilih setuju dengan pernyataan tersebut. Responden yang netral menyumbang 20% (20 responden). Di sisi lain, 9% (9 responden) memberikan jawaban tidak setuju bahwa pelatihan yang diterima sudah memadai. Jawaban terendah berasal dari responden yang sangat tidak setuju, yaitu sebanyak 1% (1 responden).

Based on data analysis from 100 respondents, it was identified that the majority of respondents (73%) gave a positive assessment of the accessibility of the sexual violence reporting system in the company. A total of 32% (32 respondents) strongly agreed and 41% (41 respondents) agreed that the company had provided an accessible and secure reporting system. Meanwhile, 18% (18 respondents) gave a neutral response, followed by 7% (7 respondents) who disagreed, and 2% (2 respondents) who strongly disagreed. These findings align with research by McDonald and Dear (2018), which shows that the effectiveness of sexual violence reporting systems heavily depends on ease of access and confidentiality guarantees. However, the percentage of neutral and dissatisfied respondents (27%) indicates there is still room for improvement, particularly in terms of socialization and transparency of reporting mechanisms, as highlighted in Farvid and Braun's (2019) study on the importance of internal communication in preventing sexual violence in the workplace.



Diagram 3: Freedom to Refuse

Based on data obtained from 100 respondents, it was found that 56% or 56 respondents strongly agreed that they felt safe rejecting inappropriate behavior without fear of repercussions from their superiors or coworkers. Meanwhile, 35% or 35 respondents agreed with the statement. Respondents who were neutral accounted for 8% or 8 respondents. A different response was given by 1% or 1 respondent who disagreed. No respondents strongly disagreed with the statement.

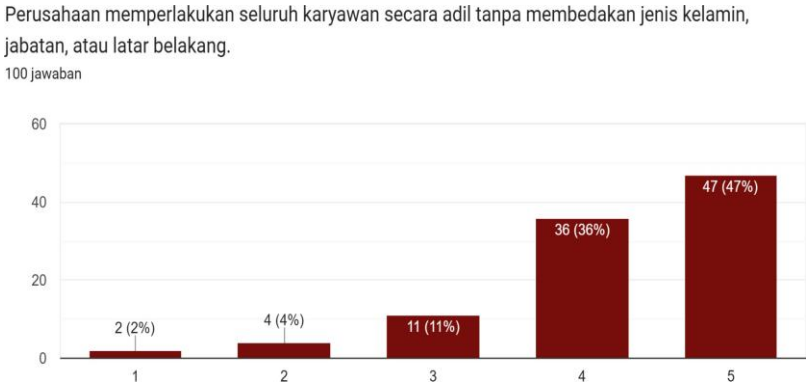


Diagram 4: Company Treatment

Based on data obtained from 100 respondents, it was found that 47% or 47 respondents strongly agreed that the company treated all employees fairly without discriminating based on gender, position, or background. Meanwhile, 36% or 36 respondents answered “agree.” Neutral responses accounted for 11% or 11 respondents. Other differing responses, indicating disagreement with the statement, contributed 4% or 4 respondents. The lowest response rate was among those who strongly disagreed, at 2% or 2 respondents. Based on data from 100 respondents, it was found that the majority of respondents, 96% or 96 respondents, answered “Yes,” indicating they believe sexual violence in the workplace violates business ethics. Meanwhile, only 4% or 4 respondents answered “No.” This finding indicates a very high level of awareness among respondents regarding the importance of maintaining business ethics and creating a workplace free from sexual violence.

Respondents' Perceptions of Sexual Violence as a Violation of Business Ethics

The majority of respondents asserted that sexual violence in the workplace constitutes a serious violation of business ethics, providing nuanced yet consistent rationales for this position. Primarily, moral and humanitarian considerations formed the foundational argument. A significant proportion of respondents emphasized that sexual violence violates fundamental human rights, degrades victim dignity, and inflicts profound psychological harm. This conduct was perceived not only as personally injurious but also as creating an environment of insecurity throughout the workplace organizationally.

From a professional ethics perspective, respondents highlighted that workplaces should inherently function as safe, productive environments grounded in mutual respect. Sexual violence was viewed as fundamentally contradicting these values while simultaneously damaging institutional reputation both internally and externally. The professional implications were consistently recognized as extending beyond individual incidents to affect organizational culture and external stakeholder perceptions.

Regarding legal and regulatory compliance, numerous respondents identified sexual violence as contravening corporate policies, Labor Law provisions, and criminal statutes pertaining to sexual harassment. They maintained that corporate tolerance of such behavior constitutes neglect of both legal and social obligations. This perspective aligns with contemporary legal scholarship emphasizing organizational accountability in preventing workplace violence (Smith & Johnson, 2021).

Cultural and religious dimensions further informed respondents' evaluations, with particular emphasis on how sexual violence conflicts with religious teachings and social norms, especially in cultures emphasizing decorum and propriety. This finding corroborates cross-cultural research demonstrating how local values shape interpretations of workplace conduct (Chen & Tang, 2022).

Finally, respondents underscored significant organizational impacts, noting that sexual violence correlates with diminished work morale, increased absenteeism, and elevated turnover rates due to eroded trust in institutional safeguards. These operational consequences substantiate existing research on the economic costs of workplace harassment (ILO, 2023). Collectively, respondent perspectives revealed a sophisticated understanding of sexual violence as not merely an ethical concern, but as a systemic business ethics violation with multidimensional consequences for individuals, organizations, and broader society. This comprehensive view reflects growing recognition of workplace violence as both a human rights issue and organizational risk factor requiring multidisciplinary intervention strategies.

Victim Protection Mechanisms in Corporate Reporting Systems

The company guarantees victims' rights to report incidents without fear of pressure or stigma by providing anonymous reporting channels, such as a dedicated hotline or email managed by an independent third party, along with encrypted documentation and restricted access to investigation files to ensure identity protection. A zero-tolerance and anti-retaliation policy is enforced through official circulars prohibiting reprisals (e.g., termination, forced transfer, or task reduction) and imposing strict sanctions on both perpetrators and supervisors who attempt to suppress reports.

Each report undergoes an independent investigation procedure conducted by an Ethics Committee or a joint team comprising HR, Legal, and external consultants in compliance with legal standards, while victims automatically receive psychological support and free legal consultation to ensure their rights are upheld. Furthermore, the company conducts regular training sessions and e-learning programs on sexual violence prevention and empathetic response for managers, alongside "safe space" culture campaigns emphasizing mutual respect and victim support. All measures are integrated into management KPIs and subjected to periodic audits to ensure consistent and effective implementation.

Corporate Strategies in Fulfilling Social Responsibility for Anti-Sexual Violence Initiatives

Based on respondent feedback, corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts to create workplaces free from sexual violence can be categorized into five complementary strategies, reflecting systematic ethical commitments. First, companies implement stringent and transparent internal policies, including anti-sexual violence provisions

integrated into corporate codes of ethics, employee handbooks, and employment contracts. These policies explicitly prohibit all forms of harassment while establishing clear reporting protocols, investigation procedures, and disciplinary measures. Many organizations further reinforce these measures through regular dissemination of zero-tolerance policies to all employees.

Second, corporations conduct comprehensive awareness programs through mandatory annual training, professional ethics seminars, and interactive workshops utilizing role-playing and case studies. Some collaborate with NGOs or external consultants to deliver victim-centered training approaches, aligning with ILO Convention No. 190 recommendations on violence prevention. Third, specialized units like Ethics Committees, Sexual Violence Prevention Task Forces, or Rapid Response Teams are established to handle reports, provide immediate assistance, and recommend corrective actions. Psychological support systems are enhanced through partnerships with counseling services, ensuring confidential victim assistance. Fourth, organizational culture transformation is pursued through sustained leadership communication, workplace visual campaigns, and inclusive value integration in daily operations. Innovative initiatives engage male employees as allies through anti-toxic masculinity programs, reflecting evidence-based approaches for cultural change.

Fifth, external CSR initiatives expand impact through public awareness campaigns, partnerships with anti-violence communities, and survivor support programs. This dual internal-external strategy demonstrates that sexual violence prevention constitutes both an ethical imperative and a business sustainability issue. Collectively, these strategies policy enforcement, continuous education, responsive support systems, equitable culture building, and public engagement reposition sexual violence prevention from mere legal compliance to integral business integrity practice. The holistic approach underscores how addressing workplace sexual violence contributes to broader organizational resilience and social impact.

Power Dynamics and the Risk of Sexual Violence in the Workplace

Most respondents highlighted that hierarchical structures and employees' dependence on superiors create a power gap that facilitates inappropriate behavior. When a superior's position significantly determines their career, victims are reluctant to speak out or report it for fear of delayed promotions or non-renewal of internship contracts. Furthermore, fear of retaliation, ranging from forced transfers, reductions in duties, to defamation, silences victims and witnesses, leaving perpetrators feeling invulnerable.

Furthermore, abuse of authority is a concern. Several respondents mentioned how flexibility in work hours or decisions regarding important documents can be exchanged for sexual "offers," demonstrating that financial power and position are often used as bargaining chips. Finally, there is a focus on the lack of accountability mechanisms. Lack of cross-unit oversight and weak internal sanctions allow perpetrators in high positions to escape without consequence, which in turn increases the risk of sexual violence in the workplace.

The Effectiveness of Business Ethics in Preventing Sexual Violence

Most respondents believe that implementing business ethics is effective in reducing sexual violence because, first, it establishes a normative framework, such as a code of

ethics, standard operating procedures (SOPs), and behavioral boundaries, as clear benchmarks for all employees. Second, it serves as a preventative tool through training programs, outreach, and case simulations that raise awareness and the ability to reject inappropriate behavior. Third, its effectiveness depends heavily on the commitment of leaders and top management, concrete support in the form of "zero tolerance" statements, budget allocation, and monitoring and enforcement of strict sanctions, so that regulations are not merely formalities. And fourth, successful implementation is ensured through continuous evaluation and accountability, regular surveys, internal/external audits, and transparent case follow-up reports. On the other hand, a small number of respondents emphasized the limitations of business ethics if it is not accompanied by a supportive organizational culture and consistent internal and external law enforcement. Therefore, without individual integrity and adequate punishment mechanisms, business ethics alone is insufficient to prevent sexual violence.

Based on Velasquez's (2012) business ethics theory, the survey results revealed that preventing sexual violence in the workplace requires a multilevel approach that includes: (1) the systemic level, where 78% of respondents emphasized the importance of firm regulations and impartial sanctions for all levels of office (Survey Results, 2023), in line with Treviño and Nelson's (2021) findings on consistent policy implementation; (2) the company level, with 65% of respondents highlighting the need for alignment between organizational culture and individual values (Schwartz, 2013), including participatory evaluation mechanisms; and (3) the individual level, where values-based HR interventions (e.g., training, mentoring) have been shown to reduce ethical violations by up to 40% (Kaptein, 2017). These findings reinforce Velasquez's postulate that an organization's ethical integrity depends on the synergy of these three levels, with a particular emphasis on the role of leadership in creating an ethical culture (Weber & Wasieleski, 2018).

Conclusion

Based on an analysis of 100 respondents (permanent employees and student interns), it was concluded that: (1) The level of awareness of the relevance of business ethics in preventing sexual violence is high (96.7% of respondents acknowledged ethical violations), with primary considerations including human rights, job security, and legal compliance; (2) The implementation of the company's program was deemed adequate, with 44.4% of respondents strongly agreeing that the code of ethics training was adequate and 38.9% stating that the reporting system was easy to access. However, 10% of respondents still identified shortcomings in both aspects, indicating the need for increased transparency and protection for whistleblowers; (3) Although 54.4% of respondents felt confident in rejecting inappropriate behavior, the hierarchical structure has the potential to hinder reporting due to career dependency and fear of retaliation.

The company's efforts through a zero-tolerance policy, regular training, and an anonymous reporting mechanism have established an adequate basis for prevention, but require systematic evaluation—particularly in handling cases involving authorities. The study's limitations in sample size and data collection duration limit the generalizability of the findings. Operational recommendations include: (a) development of case study-

based training modules, (b) periodic audits of reporting systems, and (c) optimization of the role of the HR department. For further research, an expanded sample (job level/work location), a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, and an in-depth analysis of specific HR policies are needed to produce more implementable recommendations.

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