

## Research article

# Rape by Blood Relatives: A Study of Children as Subjects of Sexual Assault

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**Abstract.**

This study's focus was children as the subjects of sexual assault by blood relatives, commonly known as incest, in Kendari city. The main questions were: 1) what were the modus operandi of these blood relatives in committing the sexual assault; 2) what were the physical and psychological impacts inflicted on the victims; and 3) what were the treatments given by the authorities in an attempt to rehabilitate the victims from post-accident trauma? The data were collected through interviews, observations and document analysis. The findings indicated that these blood relatives committed the sexual assault based on the following modus operandi: isolating the victim from the neighbourhood, taking the victim on a trip, threatening the victim with killing or beating, teasing the victim by offering something desirable, or poisoning the victim with drugs. The physical impacts inflicted on the victims were vaginal infections with pus and blood streaming from the lesion, dysfunctions of the reproductive organs, high-risk pregnancy, lacking in vitality, and paleness. Regarding the psychological impacts, the victims suffered from post-accident trauma by living in a constant fear and avoiding contact with people, isolating themselves from the crowd, social damnation and excommunication that led to internal disharmony in the family or parental divorce. The authorities, led by The Woman Empowerment and Children Protection Service, attempted immediate rehabilitation of the victims by working in cooperation with third parties such as civil society organizations and psychologists to provide basic needs, counsel the neighbourhood where the victims live to support and foster the rehabilitation, as well as educate them that such a tragedy should not justify social damnation upon the victims and their families.

**Keywords:** rape, blood relatives, sexual assault, children

## 1. Introduction

Sexual assault became a thrilling and worrying menace upon humanity as worldwide cases arise at alarming rate. The abuse inflicted both psychological and physical impacts that lasted longer to the children and put a risk to their future growth. The Ministry of Woman Empowerment and Children Protection reported that 20% of children became subjects of sexual assault every year. The Ministry of Social Affairs in cooperation with Balai Besar Penelitian dan Pengembangan Pelayanan Kesejahteraan Sosial [Great Hall

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Published 08 April 2022

Publishing services provided by Knowledge E

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Selection and Peer-review under the responsibility of the ICONIK Conference Committee.

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of Research and Development of Social Welfare Service] stationed in Yogyakarta and *End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography & Trafficking Children for Sexual Purposes* [ECPAT] reported that 43% of the sexual abusers were fellow children, 30% of them under toxic influence from their friendship circles, 11% of them were driven by psychotropic drugs, 10% of them have traumatic experience in their childhood memories of being subjects of sexual assault, and 10% of them were from broken families. One of the prominent cases of sexual assault on children was from their blood relatives such as fathers and grandfathers. The ones who supposedly protect them turned out to be their worst nightmares. Kendari city recorded numerous cases regarding this issue. The Woman Empowerment and Children Protection Service filed ten cases whereas children become subjects of sexual assault by their blood relatives.

Sexual abuse became a salient issue which attracted many researchers [1], [2][3] over the years. This study focused around three emerging phenomena of sexual assault by the blood relatives that target children as victims. Firstly, what makes the present-day cases of sexual abuse on children exhilarating was the fact that the perpetrators were the ones they knew and trusted the most; their blood relatives [3]. Secondly, sexual abuse on children was not the case of “imported modernity” but more about intrafamilial sexual practice widely known as incest. This sexual practice, which is started among the members of family, often attracts the strangers to commit inappropriate sexual practices to the victims and it inflicts a long-lasting traumatic experience that has both physical and psychological impacts. This traumatic experience grows stronger over the time and cast the victims into a life of constant fear and guilty. It often leads to emotional instability where the victims are expressing abnormal behaviours or showing an aggressive stance which results in mental illness if they are treated inappropriately. Thirdly, this particular case of sexual abuse reflects a different pathological condition of mental illness in children from a lower social class. This study proposed a distinct portrayal of sexual abuse on children in two terms. First, it described the practice of sexual misbehaviour in a society with moral decadence as a result of disrespecting religious values and having worse educational backgrounds. Second, it showed how did traumatic experience affect the life of the children as subjects of sexual assault. The pilot study suggested that the children with such traumatic experience need to attend appropriate treatments with continuous supports to ensure their social growth.

This study attended the emerging cases in Kendari city, Southeast Sulawesi, regarding the children as victims of sexual abuse by their blood relatives particularly those who receive less support from their families and neighbourhoods. These sexual abuses were committed by fathers, grandfathers, uncles, step-fathers, and closest relatives with

various modus operandi such as intense persuasion by offering something desirable, promising a better treatment, or even posing a threat. This study intended to explain the following problems in details: 1. the modus operandi of these blood relatives in committing the sexual assault, 2. the physical and psychological impacts inflicted on the victims, and 3. the treatments given by the authorities in an attempt to rehabilitate the victims from post-accident trauma?

## 2. Research Method

This study was a case study and the qualitative data were based on perspectives in social, healthy, and psychological relations of the children. These perspectives were converted into narratives and interpreted according to avouchment by the perpetrators. Data collection, data processing, and critical analysis were done in both multistage and multilevel examination. The data were acquired through documentations, observations, and in-depth interviews. The analysis took place as the data acquired from the informants to be validated and confirmed with the statements from other informants. The researchers then sorted out the relevant information and classified them for further re-examinations before reaching the conclusions. The researchers followed these procedures: a formulating the research problems, b interpreting the data to simulate the factual occurrences, c categorizing the relevant information to be interpreted narratively, d making data reduction from interrelated concepts to establish a relevant typology to the research purposes.

## 3. Results and Discussion

The following Table illustrated the recorded cases of rape by blood relatives in Kendari city, Southeast Sulawesi:

**Table 1.** Data source: The Woman Empowerment and Children Protection Service in Kendari City.

### 3.1. Case Descriptions:

1. NA and RA were six-year old. Their grandfather, age 80, raped them in the absence of their parents who work as freelance construction labourers. The crime scene took place at their home. The perpetrator committed the sexual assault in

TABLE 1

No	Initials	Age	Domiciles	Blood Relation [Perpetrators]
1	NA & RA	6	Kel.Poasia Abeli Kota Kendari	Grandfather
2	MA	13	Kel.Watulondo Puuwatu	Uncle
3	NR	14	Kel. Wawowanggu Kadia	Father
4	MF	13	Kel. Aggoeaya Kec. Poasia	Step-Father
5	FBR	8	Kel. Anawai Wua-Wua	Brother in Law
6	NU	5	Kel. Nambo Abeli	Father
7	CC	9	Kel. Benuanirae Abeli	Step-Father
8	DS	13	Kel. Benuanirae Abeli	Father

several occasions. The victims suffered from physical trauma and bleeding with the expulsion of pus from vaginal infection.

2. NR, age 14, experienced her first sexual assault by her father in her fifth grade of elementary school. The rape continued to the point she started her first year of junior high school. Her father was a freelance worker who stayed jobless for a couple of years. The rape took place at her home while her mother was out for groceries or even took her to some quiet places such as farms around her village. Her father forced her with physical abuse such as beating or throwing her with an ashtray when she refused to do so.
3. MA, age 13, lived with her uncle since her school was closer to her uncle's home. The rape took place in the middle of the night as she slept. Her uncle forced her with physical abuse and often use psychotropic drugs to make her fall unconscious. The rape continued until the perpetrator got her pregnant. She suffered from constant sicknesses and affected her physically.
4. MF, age 13, lived with her step-father. She lived with constant fear of physical abuse. Her first experience with rape came by the moment she was asked to escort her step-father to East Kolaka city. Her step-father raped her in the car and threatened her with killing if she ever speaks about it to someone else, particularly her mother. It was her uncle, her biological father's younger brother, who suspected that her niece behaved as if she was not herself and asked her to tell the story. She was pale, depressed, her gaze was empty, spent her time avoiding everyone, and showed aggressive behaviour toward people around her. The rape experience along with her psychotropic drug consumption resulted in her unstable mind.
5. DS, age 13, has been a subject of sexual assault by her father since she was eleven-year old. Her first experience of sexual abuse started in forty days since

her mother passed away. Her father would come at night and slept by her side. The upcoming nights became nightmares for her as her father forced her sexually and got her pregnant. She was excommunicated by the neighbourhood and forced to stay locked in her home without any possibility of physical contact with other people.

6. CC was nine-year old when her mother signed a contract to work abroad and left her with her step-dad. With her mother being absent, her step-father forced his way into her and raped her whenever he pleased to commit so. Her step-father treated her so badly that the victim suffer from psychological trauma. The Woman Empowerment and Children Protection Service stepped into and intervened to help the victim recover from her trauma. Her recovery is still on progress and she showed a significant change with her family support.

### 3.2. Contributing Factors of Rape by Blood Relatives

Emerging cases in rape by blood relatives or an incest sexual practice were driven by the following factors:

1. Economic factors: all cases where the blood relatives were committing sexual assaults on the victims came from the citizen with middle to lower economic status. All family members lived in a small house with only small rooms to separate each member. Most of the perpetrators were jobless or part time workers with lower incomes not enough to sustain their living costs. They spent most of their time staying at home as they did not attach to regular schedules as full-time workers did. This condition turned their focus on sexual drives and fantasies. As they could not find a target to release their sexual desires, they turned to their own blood. Living in poverty made these families barely survive with their basic needs and drive them to commit physical abuse to cope with psychological burdens. Their financial struggles worsened with their lower educational backgrounds as they have no set of skill to find a decent job. They also lacked respects to religious values to help them cope with their psychological burdens. These conditions affected their state of minds and they turned to physical abuse that often target the youngest family member.
2. Environmental factors: these factors concerned with past experiences of the perpetrators such as lacking sexual education in their teen phase or trying to suppress their sexual desires and not having turning these desires into other positive

attitudes. These experiences resulted in spontaneous psychological shocks as their sexual desires kicked in and not having religious awareness to be conscious of immediate consequences from their wrongdoing. Most of the perpetrators committed the rape out of uncontrollable sexual arousal after physical stimulation [e.g. seeing the body of their victims], lack of sexual intercourse since the absence of their wives, sleeping with their victims, or lacking awareness of the situation prior to alcohol or psychotropic drug consumptions. In some cases, certain misunderstanding such as believing that women as mere sexual objects contribute to attach a justification to their wrongdoing.

3. Relational factors: these factors came from internal disharmony of family relation. The absence of victim's mother due to divorce or leaving the home for work allowed the perpetrators to assault their victims as they pleased. The divorce has a high chance of leaving the children unnurtured since the parents concerned more of providing their children with living necessities rather than attending them with love and care.
4. Psychological factors: the sense of belonging in its most radical form allowed the father to justify every act he committed on their children and in certain cases involved sexual assaults. This particular mental illness is believed to be a prominent factor of rape by blood relatives according to psychologists.
5. Educational factors: lacking access to a decent education or not receiving a formal education at all also contributed to the perpetrators' justification of their sexual assaults. In many cases, the victims were not considering turn themselves to for assistance from the authorities because they believed such act would not make any difference at all. Lacking the knowledge of what must be done after such incident led the victims unaware of their situation. The incest rape is not a regular case of rape. It is a disgrace upon the name of the family which brings a shame that lasts into generations. It brings a curse upon the future of the victims as the social damnation would haunt them for the rest of their lives. Therefore, it is an inauspicious circumstance if the rapists from blood relatives were treated equally before law with the common rapists.
6. Religious factors: lack of respects of religious values were among prominent factors that drove the perpetrators committed their crimes. Religious values played an important role in keeping harmony among members of society. Indonesian citizens put these values in high regards and let it shape their social norms and relations. The perpetrators were never receiving religious guidance in any circumstance.

They believed that they could see any body part of their blood relatives. In fact, Islamic teaching did not allow fathers to see some parts of their daughters' body if they have reached certain age as the Quran and the Hadiths mentioned. The parents should not sleep in a bed with their sons or daughters if they have reached maturity. These are their parents and who are beyond them are even strictly prohibited.

The rehabilitative measures to the victims had been attempted by the local government of Kendari city through Woman Empowerment and Children Protection Service in cooperation with Civil Society Organization [CSO], professional psychologists, and concerned third parties. Some victims who need medical attentions received appropriate treatments from the local health centres and hospitals. All costs from these treatments were covered by the government until the victims reached a full recovery. Moreover, the government, with the aid from Civil Society Organization [CSO] which concerns woman and child issues, also assigned lawyers to make sure the perpetrators receive a maximum sentence of their crimes. The Woman Empowerment and Children Protection Service watched the victims in their recovery by making sure they gain recognition from the public and not suffer from social damnation or excommunication. The local government approached the neighbourhood and educated them about the importance of children protection to anticipate future cases and to step forward to prevent or to take precautions of rape by the blood relatives.

### **3.3. The Impacts of Rape by Blood Relatives to the Children**

All children who were victims of sexual assault by their blood relatives reported in this study suffered from both physical and psychological trauma.

The physical trauma represented in injuries such as pain, bleeding, vaginal infections, expulsion of pus, abnormal physical and hormonal change due to high risk pregnancy at a young age, and some of them showed bruises and wounds from beating or struck by sharp objects. Some victims suffered from dizziness, queasiness, nausea, feeling about to vomit, and developing severe pain around their body. The physical manifestations of this trauma also include appetite loss, sleep deprivation, headache, painful sensation around the genitals, sexual disease contamination, wounds and fractures in some body parts, unwanted pregnancy, and contusions.

The psychological trauma represented in constant fear, sadness, faint, feeling guilty, loss of personal confidence, anger, resentment, hate, and feeling unworthy. The intensity of these representations varied among the victims. Different memory from traumatic

experiences posed by the perpetrators and their modus operandi determined the varied representations.

The sexual assaults and rapes by the blood relatives haunted the victims with social damnation as incest practice is a deep shame to a civilization. Henceforth, the psychological trauma on children who become subjects of sexual assault lasted longer and hard to efface from memory. Without immediate treatments and accompanied recovery from the authorities and the professionals, the children may suffer from a severe mental illness. Weber and Smith revealed that sexual abuse has a long-lasting impact on children in which the psychological trauma from the incident may turn the victims into the perpetrators as a coping mechanism from suppressing and hiding the trauma over the years. The feeling of helplessness which was experienced by the victims as the rape took place developed a certain perception in their sub-conscious state of minds that the stronger subjects could prey on weaker subjects and force them to perform whatever they were told to do so including the sexual fantasies. Most of the victims at earlier age suffered from a post-traumatic disorder in which the victims showed certain symptoms such as intense anxiety and unstable emotional expressions after the incident. Beitch-man et.al. suggested that the children who become subjects of sexual assaults need two to three years of fully attended recovery to start opening themselves to other people. The pain and living under pressure of those traumatic experiences intimidated the children by bringing back memories of physical tortures prior to the rape incidents and it kept telling the victims to stay quiet and silent. The repeated physical tortures before the main incident always end as a psychological distress.

Finkelhor and Browne categorized four traumatic impacts experienced by the children as victims of sexual assaults. First, it is betrayal, since the perpetrators constantly exercised the victims' trust during the incident. The status of blood relatives basically granted a trusted position among family members. Whenever this trust is constantly exercised with threats and physical abuses, it turns into something depressing. Second, it is traumatic sexualization, daughters who experienced sexual abuse tend to perceive sexual intercourse as a shameful experience and this perception may result in domestic sexual violence. Finkelhor concluded that the rape victims may prefer same-sex sexual intercourse since they have lost trust for the opposite sex. Third, it is powerlessness which comes with phobias. These phobias embodied in nightmares and intense anxiety. It also attacked the victims physically as this constant fear attract automatic responses from the body such as trembling and sweating. Some of the victims often showed



excessive internal drives with an unexpected physical response. Fourth, it is stigmatization whereas the victims were feeling guilty and shameful, and developing a defective personal image. The guilt and shame took control as the victims felt powerless over social damnation in which the public condemned the shameful crime regardless those who involved either the perpetrators or the victims.

The rapes by the blood relatives took many modes of operandi. However, the prominent trigger was living together under a roof. The blood relatives who supposed to care and protect the younger family members turned into sexual predators instead. Warshaw [4] predicted that the perpetrators would likely to commit a crime, even the most shameful one such as raping their blood relatives, if they share the same territory with their victims. Living around their victims would likely provide the best chance for the perpetrators to carry out their intention. Having the advantage of knowing every aspect of their victims' life including their habits and routines would grant the perpetrators a starting point to go through with their plan; determining their victims' weak points. Considering this, it was no surprise to find rape cases of which the perpetrators were the ones knew and trusted the most such as friends, neighbours, and even their blood relatives. The incidents occurred in a way that the victims might not aware of their situation since they would not expect something bad from with the people they trusted were around. These findings counterbalance the common belief that rape can only be committed by the strangers or people that the victims were never knew about [5]. The children whom the blood relatives forced into an incest practice were the ones who suffered from constant threats and anxious state of minds. The perpetrators, in these cases, knew exactly the crime they were committing and were well aware of the consequences of their wrongdoing.

### **3.4. The Recovery Treatments for Children as Victims of Sexual Assaults**

The children who become subjects of sexual assaults received a special attention from the authorities. Each victim from the reported cases in Kendari city was in a program of attended rehabilitation fully supported by the local government, civil society organizations, the woman empowerment and children protection service, psychologists, and other concerned third parties. Such a large parties took deeper interests in rehabilitating the victims since the children, in their physical and psychological growth, were considered relevant in determining the future of local societies and leaving them unattended after such tragic incidents would trigger social distrust or even social unrest.

The recovery process was done thoroughly in complete and comprehensive measures. Every child was treated equally regardless her backgrounds by ensuring the treatments met each needs and paces. The principles behind these treatments were in accordance with the belief as Age [6] put it, "protecting the children means protecting the future of the family, the society, and the nation itself." This statement agreed with the mission of the local government that the importance of ensuring the protection and care for the children as a mean to maintain national security. The attended recovery was also to make sure the victims did not take another course of irresponsible action such as doing drugs or alcohol consumption .The local government, with the help and control from other concerned third parties, made sure the state took full responsibility in the victims' rehabilitation and recovery while taking preventive measures to anticipate future incidents.

#### 4. Conclusions

The sexual assaults on children which were committed by the blood relatives [an incest practice] have a long-lasting physical and psychological impacts. The victims of the rapes suffered from stress, depression, mental disorders, guilt, anger, hatred, shame, and self-blaming which were presented in insomnia, nightmares, constant fear, unexpected physical responses in the presence of certain objects, distrusting people, sexual disfunction, somatic complaints, chronic illness, addiction, intense urge to commit suicide, and unwanted pregnancies. Other psychological symptoms included post-traumatic disorders, anxiety, self-confidence loss, and dissociative personality disorders. The short-term post-traumatic responses included intense nightmares, overreactive responses to certain stimulus, afraid of being with someone else, loss of focus and concentration, and physical injuries such as bruises and wounds. The long-term post-traumatic responses included phobia of being in a relationship, feeling disgust of sexual intercourse with the opposite sex, and having abnormal fantasies about sexual drives. What happened to these victims would shape their perspectives on the world and its social complexities. The victims of sexual assaults by the blood relatives who were reported in this study suffered more from psychological trauma. There were serious physical traumas which need a long-term medical attention but the post-traumatic responses out of psychological burdens were more disturbing. Immediate and complete recovery and rehabilitation programs with supports from the government and other concerned parties were necessary to help these victims regain their self-confidence. The social welfare programs such as woman empowerment and children protection were

found to be helpful and facilitative to the victims. However, it needed enhancements and supports from law enforcement to make the perpetrators get what they deserve. Nevertheless, these phenomena proved that the children were still in danger of rape or sexual assaults even from their blood relatives.

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