

Adolescent Sexual Abuse Victims' Grief Experiences Through Kubler-Ross Theory

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ABSTRACT

Sexual harassment is the behavior of asking for unwanted sexual activity, whether physical, verbal, or otherwise. This study aims to understand the experiences of victims of sexual harassment through Kubler-Ross's 5 stages of Grief, namely denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance, so that victims of sexual harassment can understand the stages of non-death grief, not feel alone, and not blame themselves. The method used is a qualitative case study approach. Data collection was carried out through interviews, observation, and documentation. Participants were 16-year-old female students who experienced sexual harassment. Data analysis techniques through 4 stages: data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Data validity techniques were carried out by triangulation of source data, namely by combining the results of interviews, observations, and documentation, and strengthened by previous research. The results of the study showed that participants experienced 5 stages of grief, although not sequentially.

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Introduction

Sexual harassment is a form of violence involving unwanted sexual advances (Hardiman & Saefudin, 2023). Behaviors such as physical, verbal, and other sexual advances can be categorized as sexual harassment (Prameswari & Khoirunnisa, 2020). Sexual harassment in adolescents often occurs in the form of sexual acts of sodomy, incest, catcalling, seductive behavior through social media, rape and molestation (Marvenda et al., 2024; Nasri & Usmita, 2023; Qila et al., 2021; Rosyidah & Nurdin, 2018). Most perpetrators of sexual

harassment and violence are those closest to the victim, such as family, friends, and teachers (Sartika et al., 2022)

Incidents of sexual harassment do not only occur in company areas, offices, or certain more public locations, but can also occur in educational environments (Tan et al., 2022). The phenomenon of sexual harassment often occurs in schools, and schools can even become the main place where sexual harassment occurs (Sweeting et al., 2022). According to the Kementerian Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Perlindungan Anak (2025) adolescents are highly vulnerable to sexual harassment, especially those aged 13-17. In education, the highest number of victims of sexual harassment occurs in high school, followed by junior high school. This can be due to a lack of understanding or education about sexuality, preventing them from recognizing the signs of sexual harassment (Rosyidah & Nurdin, 2018). Adolescence is a time of change, identity formation, and exploration of self-control, making them more vulnerable to external influences (Ardiansyah et al., 2023).

The impacts that occur on victims of sexual harassment have a significant impact on their mental health and life, causing health issues, damaging their mental, physical, and social well-being, and can also cause somatic effects (Ajayi et al., 2021). The impact of sexual harassment on adolescents can cause victims to experience suffering, various emotional problems, depression, loss of appetite, difficulty sleeping, decreased academic performance at school, and self-harm (Novrianza & Santoso, 2022).

Based on previous research, there are still many cases of sexual harassment that cause victims to experience a lot of suffering, ranging from psychic to psychological. The results of research Effriza et al. (2024) found that sexual harassment in public spaces has the impact of trauma, fear, low self-esteem, behavioral changes and difficulty socializing. Research conducted by Yudha et al. (2017) also found that the experience and impact of sexual harassment can make some victims able to forgive the perpetrator. Ardiansyah et al. (2023), in their research also discussed the increasing cases of sexual harassment against adolescents, both in schools, universities, public spaces and online media, which have serious impacts on various aspects. This study also provides three main strategies in handling sexual harassment: prevention through sexual education, increasing adolescent awareness of the dangers of harassment, and intervention through bystander programs that are effective in reducing the incidence of sexual harassment.

The difference between this study and previous research lies in its primary focus, which addresses the psychological loss experienced by victims of sexual abuse using Kubler-

Ross' Grief Theory. This theory was chosen because it is relevant to the current rampant issue of sexual abuse, where victims experience profound feelings of grief or loss. Grief in Kubler-Ross' Grief Theory, is not solely focused on a reaction to death but can also be a reaction to various losses, such as the death of a loved one, as well as the loss of opportunities, dreams, health, security, and identity. Several previous studies have examined sexual abuse using various theories, such as Surbakti & Sugiyanto (2022) which discussed sexual abuse using Subjective Expected Utility Theory. Another study, by Harjoni (2021) addressed sexual violence using the theories of Michael Foucault and Johan Galtung. Yuswikarini (2024) study focuses on depression in adolescent victims of sexual abuse, using Beck's Cognitive Theory and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) interventions.

Based on the literature review presented previously, this research is crucial because sexual harassment is a serious issue that has long-term psychological impacts on victims, especially adolescents. Furthermore, this research will outline the stages of psychological loss experienced by victims of sexual harassment through the Kubler-Ross Grief Theory, which comprehensively describes the stages of non-mortal grief. This allows victims of sexual harassment to understand the stages of non-mortal grief, feel less alone, and avoid blaming themselves for their traumatic experiences.

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Method

This research uses a qualitative method with a case study approach. Qualitative methods are chosen to understand a problem in depth and are descriptive in nature. The case study approach is used to study a particular phenomenon or event comprehensively and in detail. This research was conducted for 3 months involving one informant, namely a teenager who experienced sexual harassment for 6 months at school. Data collection was carried out through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique with the criteria of being a female teenager, having experienced sexual harassment, and experiencing psychological loss characterized by

decreased achievement, self-confidence, and difficulty building relationships with the opposite sex. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observation, and documentation. Data validity techniques were carried out by triangulating source data, namely ensuring the accuracy of the data obtained by combining the results of interviews, observations and documentation, and strengthening it with previous research data. The collected data were then analyzed referring to the Miles and Huberman analysis stages, namely data reduction, descriptive data presentation, and then drawing conclusions.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

Based on the research findings, Nana's experience can be interpreted using Kubler-Ross Grief Theory. This theory identifies five stages of loss: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance, which are outlined in the research findings below.

Stages of Grief in Victims of Sexual Harassment

The results of the study showed that Nana experienced a form of denial of the reality that she was being harassed by her classmates. Nana explained that during junior high school she was in a boarding-based Islamic school, so she rarely interacted with male friends except during class hours. When she moved away from home and entered vocational school, she met many male friends in her class, she felt that one of her male friends named Tian (pseudonym) behaved strangely, but she ignored it. On the first day of school, Nana felt that Tian did not experience any harassment at school, but on the second day Tian began to introduce Nana, this introduction was considered normal by Nana because they were new students at the school, this introduction made Tian dare to do further things, such as touching without permission. Nana tried to interpret Tian's behavior as something common that happens in big cities or a joke. During the interview, Nana said, "At first I just kept quiet because I thought he was just joking," "I thought it was a cultural difference, maybe that's how Samarinda kids are." At this stage, Nana could not yet admit that the situation was harassment, this stage lasted for 3 weeks.

The Anger stage appeared when Nana began to realize that Tian was doing unnatural and very disturbing actions. Tian started sending inappropriate words, showing different behaviors to Nana such as throwing books that were only done to Nana not to other friends, sending inappropriate photos and inviting Nana to have sexual relations via WhatsApp. These

behaviors made Nana realize that she was being harassed by her classmates, this made Nana uncomfortable, this was seen from Nana's words during the interview "I was like uncomfortable, then finally got angry" and "I even prayed bad for him" aimed at Tian as the perpetrator. After that, Nana decided to move schools, but a teacher who came from the same area as Nana advised Nana to stay at this school, because not many children from Nana's home area could enter this school. Nana still made up her mind to transfer schools, she submitted a transfer certificate, but this was not welcomed by the school, the letter that Nana gave to be signed was then torn up by her teacher. This incident made Nana sad and angry, she said "The school is not enough, they only called him, there was no follow-up". Apart from that, Nana was also angry and blamed herself, this can be seen from the sentence "I'm angry with myself... why didn't I fight back", this shows that, apart from being angry with the perpetrator and the school, Nana was also angry with herself, this stage lasted for 2 months.

After Nana realized that she had experienced sexual harassment, what was clearly visible in Nana was the stage of depression, she began to feel ashamed, sad, afraid, and felt like she had lost her self-esteem for 1 month. Nana said there was a certain fear after she realized that she had been sexually harassed, cold sweats and trembling were the responses that appeared in Nana when the perpetrator was around her. Another fear also appeared when Nana wanted to continue being accompanied by friends in class when going to the toilet or to the cafeteria, because the perpetrator would not dare to approach Nana when Nana was with her friends. Nana also felt anxious because the perpetrator always stalked Nana when she came home from school. According to Nana, this also affected her self-esteem, during the interview Nana expressed her feelings, "I feel dirty, I have no self-esteem" which shows that Nana has lost her self-esteem. Nana also withdrew from the environment to the point of deciding not to go to school for 2 weeks because of fear, this made Nana's academic performance decline. This fear controlled Nana until it led to recurring nightmares about the perpetrator which made Nana even more anxious when she met the perpetrator.

Nana also blamed herself, making assumptions and trying to find reasons why this could have happened. She wondered about her mistakes that led to this incident. This was evident in Nana's words during the interview, "Sometimes I think, what's wrong with me... why didn't I just keep quiet?" Nana revealed that she blamed herself for not fighting back when the perpetrator touched her without permission, "Why didn't I fight back? When I was at school, for example, I was touched, why didn't I slap him, why didn't I just keep quiet?"

Nana also expressed regret for remaining silent during the incident, which lasted for three weeks. Nana then said, "I cried after school, so I felt like I regretted it myself, but if it happened again, I just kept quiet." These words show the bargaining stage or the process of bargaining with herself.

The final stage that Nana went through was the acceptance stage, even though Nana had not fully recovered, this acceptance process took place for 5 weeks until finally she began to accept reality and tried to live a more stable life like before. Acceptance in Nana's case does not mean forgiving, but rather starting to accept that the incident had happened and daring to try to rearrange her life. Nana explained that she could already control everything she felt, Nana also assured herself not to get carried away by the fear she felt, because Nana's classmates also really protected Nana from the perpetrator. In addition, Nana also thought about her purpose of moving to another city, remembering her parents' struggles so that Nana could be in this phase. Nana even made this unpleasant experience a lesson for herself and a reminder for others. This can be seen from Nana's statements such as, "Now it's like just let it go, because I'm tired", "Now I can control myself better", "I remember the purpose of being here, for my parents", "At most, it's just a reminder for others to be careful".

Analysis of Grief Stage Patterns

The dominant stages of grief that appeared in Nana were anger and depression. When Nana first realized that she had been sexually harassed, she immediately felt angry, but this anger was mostly directed at herself, not at the perpetrator, because for Nana she should have been able to prevent what the perpetrator did from the moment he started bothering her. The anger that arose in her made her depressed, she felt regret, felt she had no self-esteem, didn't have the courage to mingle with new people, had difficulty sleeping, and it carried over into Nana's subconscious, such as recurring nightmares about the perpetrator.

Nana went through all the stages proposed by Grief Kubler-Ross, but the stages of Grief that Nana went through did not occur in order starting from denial, anger, bargaining, depression then acceptance. Nana experienced denial first, then followed by the anger stage directed at the perpetrator, the school and herself. Then anger triggered depression in Nana, which was clearly seen after she realized that she had experienced sexual harassment. Then she went through the bargaining stage, which made Nana wonder to herself why this happened to her, Nana also regretted that she could not fight what Tian did to her. The last

stage that Nana went through was acceptance, Nana tried to accept everything that happened, began to dare to rebuild her life that had been destroyed and control what she felt.

Discussion

Kubler-Ross's theory is a theory developed by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross using a framework of five phases of loss, namely denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance (S. A. Dewi & Gusthini, 2025), for the Grief Kubler-Ross stage can be seen in figure 1. Each individual goes through these stages in different ways and in different sequences (Siahaan & Ratnasari, 2025). Loss can manifest in many forms, such as loss due to death or deep feelings of grief. Grief can arise from any loss that has a significant impact on the individual experiencing it (Sweetman & O'Donnell, 2020). According to Shear, as cited in Ausie & Mansoer (2020) research, grief is a complex psychological response to loss that involves various feelings, thoughts, and behaviors related to the loss. Research by Thøgersen & Glinborg (2022) states that grief is not only focused on a reaction to death, but can also be a reaction to various losses such as the death of a loved one, as well as the loss of opportunities, dreams, health, and identity. Nana's experience can be described using Kubler-Ross's 5 stages of grief below.

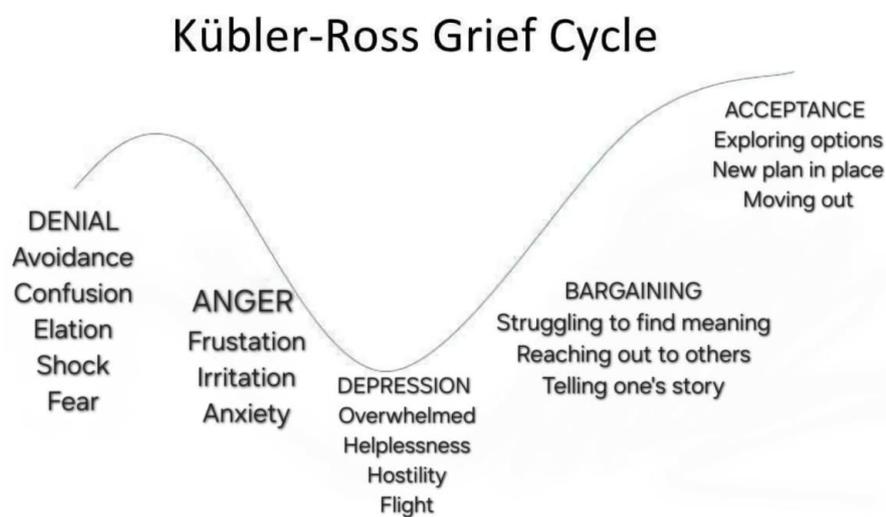


Figure 1. Kubler-Ross Grief Cycle

Stages of Grief In Victims of Sexual Harassment

The findings from the research above indicate that Nana experienced a stage of denial, which caused her to reject the reality of being harassed by her classmates. Denial is an ego defense mechanism, where people may reject the reality of what is happening (Antika et al.,

2024). The denial stage is a rejection that means rejecting existing reality and emerging feelings of discomfort (Burhan & Febriliant, 2021; E. F. Dewi & Poerwandari, 2023). The literature review described above reinforces the denial stage experienced by Nana.

After Nana realized she had experienced sexual harassment, anger was the second stage she went through. Research by Fridayanti & Fitriah (2020) which states that anger can be defined as the highest emotion triggered by threatening or frustrating social situations. This study also discusses passive nonverbal expressions of anger, such as silence, isolation, and crying. Research by Nurhalimah (2023) states that uncontrolled anger can have negative effects ranging from physical to mental health. Then, the research of Audina et al. (2023) discusses anger management in adolescent perpetrators of violence. The results of the study indicate that anger is a negative emotion that can arise and explode. These studies reinforce the stage of anger experienced by Nana.

Nana's anger was then followed by depression. At this stage, Nana began to feel ashamed, sad, afraid, lost enthusiasm for activities, and felt a loss of self-esteem. Nana's feelings are consistent with research conducted by Lutfiyah (2021) that depression is a mood disorder, characterized by feelings of deep sadness, guilt, worthlessness, withdrawal from the environment, having difficulty eating, sleeping, and carrying out other activities. This was further reinforced by research by Paramitayani (2022) that depression is part of a mood disorder that encompasses a wide range of emotions triggered by many things. Furthermore, depression can also be characterized by a lack of desire to sleep, feelings of emptiness, meaninglessness, and hopelessness (Pradnyadari & Surjaningrum, 2024).

This sexual harassment caused Nana to go through a bargaining stage, although it did not last long. Bargaining is a phase in which individuals question whether the loss will occur if something can be changed. This stage is characterized by regret and guilt (Nugroho & Hermanto, 2023). At this stage, Nana often blames her self, makes assumptions, and negotiates with her self. Other studies also discuss bargaining as a psychological response, such as in the study Cindy & Sudarji (2018) discussing the bargaining stage, such as negotiating with others and questioning what has happened.

The final stage that appeared in Nana was acceptance. She began to accept reality and tried to live a more stable life than before. Several articles discuss acceptance in several cases, such as in research Ardhani & Nawangsih (2020) explaining that acceptance is applying acceptance to overcome problems and enable individuals to take appropriate action in overcoming any problems they face. Septiana & Muhid (2022) in his research explains that

self-acceptance is the ability to accept oneself and one's life experiences positively. Another study Sulha et al. (2024) discusses self-acceptance as positive acceptance of oneself, which involves recognizing one's strengths and weaknesses without blaming anyone.

Analysis of Grief Stage Patterns

The results of the study show that the dominant stages experienced by Nana were the stages of anger and depression. Nana also went through all the stages described by Kubler-Ross, only not in sequence. Nana went through the stage of denial first, followed by anger, then depression, bargaining, and acceptance. Although she did not go through the stages of grief in sequence, this was not a problem. Because the five stages proposed by Kubler-Ross do not always occur in sequence (Nugroho & Hermanto, 2023). Kubler-Ross states that a person experiencing at least two of the five stages. In some cases, individuals will experience repeated stages before reaching the final stage of acceptance (Intan & Wardiani, n.d.). Other research by Muslimah et al. (2025) also discusses the sequence of stages in Kubler-Ross's model of grief, which does not necessarily occur in sequence, as each individual has different ways of coping with the grieving process.

Conclusion

Based on the research findings and discussions that have been described, it can be concluded that the experiences of adolescent victims of sexual harassment can be understood through the 5 stages of Kubler-Ross Grief, namely denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Participants showed impacts in the form of stress, withdrawal from the environment, hampered learning processes, loss of security and trust in men around them to feelings of inferiority. Another clearly visible impact was that participants experienced trembling, cold sweats and panic when the perpetrator was around them. The results of the study showed a unique pattern of Kubler-Ross grief stages experienced by Nana, she experienced 5 stages of grief in a non-sequential manner, after denial for 3 weeks then anger appeared which lasted for 2 months, then followed by depression for 1 month, then bargaining for 3 weeks, and acceptance for 5 weeks. Several stages such as anger and depression were the dominant stages experienced by Nana.

As a development suggestion for school counselors to be better in following up on cases of sexual harassment that occur in the school environment, play a more active role in helping victims of sexual harassment, and accompany victims in the recovery process due to

sexual harassment by studying more deeply the Grief theory of Kubler-Ross in the context of sexual harassment. As a development suggestion for further research, it can increase the number of participants so that the results are more objective, and can conduct a more in-depth study of the grief theory of Kubler-Ross in the context of sexual harassment.

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