Identity Disguise: Communication and Resistance Strategies Against Discrimination Against Victims of Sexual Violence

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ABSTRACT

Sexual violence is an important issue that must be resolved as quickly and precisely as possible. In general, many cases of sexual violence are experienced by women from various sectors. These victims need help not only to catch the perpetrator and provide counseling, but also need protection in the form of disguised identity. There have been many mental healing efforts provided by various parties to victims of sexual violence, but still few focus on disguising the identities of the victims. In fact, victims also need their identity to be protected as best as possible. This effort has been carried out by one of the religious education institutions in Aceh, namely *Dayah* Diniyah Darussalam. The *Dayah* that he leads is used as a safe house for victims of sexual violence and also provides various efforts to restore the mental health of the victims, one of which is by disguising their identity as victims. Departing from this topic, this article examines the communication strategies developed by the *Dayah* to fight discrimination against victims of sexual violence. This research was studied using a qualitative approach and data was collected by means of in-depth interviews, observation and documentation. This research uses Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) to analyze the found data. The results of the research are that efforts to disguise identity can be used as a communication strategy to protect victims of sexual violence.

Introduction

Sexual violence continues to occur at home, in the social environment, at school, and even in Islamic boarding schools (Yuliartini & Mangku, 2021). In Indonesia, several cases of sexual violence in the Islamic boarding school environment involve power relations between the ustad and the students, or by the students against other students. For example, this is illustrated by 2 cases that caused a stir in Indonesia, namely the cases that occurred at the Shiddiqiyah Islamic Boarding School in Jombang in 2022 (Dianti et al., 2023) and the Hidayatul Hukmah Alkahfi Islamic Boarding School in Semarang in 2023 (Sakunab & Riyanto, 2023). In Aceh, cases of sexual violence also occurred in '*Dayah*', a term that refers to another name for Islamic boarding schools in Aceh. In 2023, there will be four cases of sexual violence that occurred in *Dayah*, namely in Pidie Jaya Regency, Aceh

Besar Regency, Langsa, and North Aceh Regency. These cases also have the potential to change public expectations of the *dayah*, which should be a place that is safe and free from acts of sexual violence, but has become a place that has a bad image.

Apart from requiring prevention efforts and legal treatment that are oriented towards the interests of victims, currently various parties are also focusing on efforts to handle and restore victims. In Indonesia, several institutions or communities, both formal and informal, have moved quickly to accommodate victims of sexual violence (Sari et al., 2021). For example, Komnas Perempuan, LBH Apik, Pulih Foundation, Hollaback Jakarta, and others. Several communities have even independently responded to the urgency of protecting victims of sexual violence, such as establishing communities based on education and protection for victims through social media (Chotim, 2020). For example, AwasKBGO, Gender Advocate, and so on. However, this activism movement also has its own challenges, especially related to limited access by victims on various levels. Therefore, on the other hand, this is a challenge for the government, non-governmental organizations and communities to be able to provide various means and strategies that are easily accessible to many people to prevent, protect and help victims of sexual violence to recover (Abdullah et al., 2022; Tesalonika et al., 2021; Voges et al., 2022).

Victims of sexual violence still have to face shame, self-blame, and even isolation from their own social environment. This problem adds to the victim's burden because they feel isolated because they receive negative emotions from their surroundings (Haskell & Randall, 2019). This pattern continues to put pressure on the victim because they will continue to be in a protracted cycle of fear and anxiety. This fact then emphasizes that efforts to handle and recover victims of sexual violence are still an important issue, and on the other hand, certainly require special strategies.

In the context of the Islamic boarding school environment in Indonesia, specific strategies for recovering victims of sexual violence are very diverse. For example, by teaching *Kitab Kuning* (known as the explanation about Islam by Arabic letter), because basically the contents of the *Kitab Kuning* already contain information and knowledge regarding the appeal not to get involved in potential sexually violent behavior (Nur et al., 2022). Another strategy was also demonstrated by Nyai Sinto at the Al-Hidayat Islamic Boarding School, Magelang, and the Nurul Huda Islamic Boarding School, Garut, which is managed by Ernawati Siti Syaja'ah. These two Islamic boarding schools also advocate for victims of sexual violence using various methods. However, specifically, Nyai Sinto restored the self-confidence of her students, who were victims of sexual violence, by giving them responsibility and involving the students in various tasks and activities at the Islamic boarding school (Yusuf, 2022). Apart from that, in Cilacap, the Al-Ihya Ulumaddin Islamic Boarding School is also doing the same thing. Under the authority of Nyai Hanifah Musyarah, this Islamic boarding school also actively assists victims of sexual violence and domestic violence (KDRT). By forming the Annisa Women's Hall (*Balai Perempuan*), Nyai Hanifah Musyarah provides assistance in cases of violence, as well as accommodating women to learn and strengthening community-based economic independence programs (Hanifah Muyassarah, 2021).

In the midst of the current bad image of Islamic boarding schools, several of the Islamic boarding schools above actually show a progressive attitude. The presence of Islamic boarding schools based on gender equality is a good sign of the despair of victims and companions of victims of sexual violence in Indonesia (Juraida, 2017). Although the methods used by several pro-gender-based justice Islamic boarding schools still need to be studied further, the preventive and protective actions they themselves have initiated have contributed greatly to this issue, especially for victims. Although on the other hand, currently Islamic boarding schools are still facing various challenges, such as negative stigma towards Islamic boarding school founders and managers, and even towards victims. This makes it difficult for victims to function again in their social life. Islamic boarding schools as religious-based educational institutions are the target of a bad image by society. This happens because there are many cases of sexual violence that occur within

Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia (Zaenurrosyid et al., 2022). However, the impact of the cases that occurred did not dampen the enthusiasm of Islamic boarding schools to protect their students (Tempo.co, 2022).

Each case of sexual violence is unique and requires a different strategy. This can be reflected in the emergence of several strategies and methods for handling victims of sexual violence. In the context of communication, research conducted by Dulwahab, Huriyani, and Muhtadi (2020), shows that communication is an important element in efforts to help victims of sexual violence. This communication is especially aimed at volunteers or companions. Therapeutic communication is very necessary to help victims communicate their experiences openly both within the family and in their social environment (Dulwahab et al., 2020). Other research also shows that the strategy of self-disclosure when communicating by companions of victims of sexual violence is an important step for companions in identifying the problems faced by victims (Arouf & Aisyah, 2020).

Research regarding the treatment of victims of sexual violence in Indonesia, especially in the Islamic boarding school environment, still focuses heavily on mitigation efforts. For modern Islamic boarding schools that respond to sexual violence emergencies, they have their own ways of carrying out mitigation efforts. However, researchers have not found research regarding specific strategies related to communication and identity. For example, research conducted by Dulwahab et al. (2020) dan Arouf and Aisyah (2020) which does not explore in more depth the access to transparency that not all victims have, and does not mention strategies for protecting victims. Researchers make the issue of specific strategies for handling victims and their relationship to victim identity as a gap in this research. This research is important to explore specific coping strategies with diverse perspectives. It is hoped that the findings of this research will also provide another perspective in responding to the issue of sexual violence which continues to occur, especially in the *Dayah*/Islamic boarding school environment.

This research focuses on one of the *Dayah* in West Aceh, namely *Dayah* Dinniyah Darussalam. This *Dayah* also shelters victims of violence, including sexual violence. This *Dayah* certainly has its own strategy so that it can survive for the past 10 years. Based on initial observations made by researchers, Umi Hanisah as the founder of *Dayah* explained that this action was her response to the lack of protection institutions for victims in Aceh, especially in West Aceh. This is also exacerbated by the fact that access to aid is mostly concentrated in the provincial capital, Banda Aceh.

When carrying out initial observations, the researcher also observed the social interactions and communication carried out by the victims at the *Dayah*. Researchers did not find any different or striking behavior from all the students there. Umi Hanisah explained that all the victims in the *Dayah* were able to connect and communicate each other, and it did not affect their interactions and communication. Umi Hanisah explained this because they already begin with the new life and new story. Every victim who enters the *Dayah* will automatically have their identity disguised as a santri. The initial identity of the victim was only known by Umi Hanisah and several teachers there. Of course, this strategy can be implemented by Umi Hanisah with special considerations.

Theoretical Framework

Identity is interpreted as a symbolic creation by a person based on his or her personal appearance and role. This identity also influences how a person views himself, and how a person wants to be seen by others (Duck & McMahan, 2016). Furthermore, identity can be: a) personal identity such as good or bad, b) relational identity such as relationships between family members, friends, enemies, c) social identity such as employee, student, d) demographic identity such as gender, age, class. economy and so on. Based on the explanation above, researchers see a correlation between a person's identity and the communication and interactions they carry out. Identity can be formed with the

aim of maintaining, strengthening, and even changing relationships when interacting and communicating. Much of a person's identity is formed in their interactions with others, the image they want to project, anticipated interactions, and the way people respond to and evaluate them. Identity is also influenced by efforts to observe oneself, behave and interact, and observe how people respond to them (Guerrero et al., 2017).

Research in the context of information technology, identity disguise is a phenomenon that more often has negative intentions. For example through research Chollet et al. (2012) It is explained that disguise of identity is correlated with crime. This research shows forms of behavior that often arise, such as identity theft, hiding it, and even falsifying it for various purposes. This pattern is easy to find as digital-based interaction and communication patterns develop. Other issues of identity disguise can also be observed through research on the social media Instagram. Yuliawati and Fauzan (2020) exploring the motives for disguising identities by 4 (four) Instagram accounts. The results of this research show that although on the one hand disguised identity has negative intentions, on the other hand it is actually taken advantage of by them. For example, they are free to disseminate any information without it having to be linked to their real personality and identity. Furthermore, by using another identity, the four accounts can get a financial boost.

The motive or reason for disguising one's identity can be triggered by many purposes. It is this impulse that is explained (Yuliawati & Fauzan, 2020) can help someone facilitate themselves to express freely, feel not worried about their surroundings, including not feeling afraid and embarrassed. Likewise, the identity disguise strategy carried out by Umi Hanisah certainly has implications for at least the santri (victim), other santri, the founder of the *Dayah*, and even the existence of the *Dayah*. This issue is the basis for this research, namely exploring again how identity disguise can be formed, and what implications it has. Researchers discuss this issue using The Communication Theory of Identity (TCI), which explains that communication is identity and identity is communication (Hecht & Phillips, 2021). These frameworks shape individuals' sense of self and influence their interactions in various social contexts.

Method

This research uses a qualitative approach. Researchers obtained data through two methods. First, in-depth interviews with the aim of finding the root of the problem in depth from various perspectives (Brinkmann, 2014). Researchers interviewed three (3) informants, namely Umi Hanisah as the founder of *Dayah*, as well as two (2) female teachers who are also survivors of sexual violence. Interviews with these three informants were carried out using semi-structured interviews. Second, researchers obtained data using the observation method on five victims of sexual violence who were accommodated in the *Dayah*. Researchers observed how the five victims interacted and communicated with the *Dayah* leaders, teachers and other fellow students. The researchers made these observations during five (5) visits to the shelter. The researchers chose this observation technique to provide a sense of comfort for the students at the *Dayah*. This *Dayah* not only accommodates children who are victims of sexual violence, but also domestic violence, victims of neglect, and so on.

The researchers then analyzed the data using the Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) technique, which is an analytical technique that aims to explore and interpret a collection of data and tell the story based on patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2019). There are six (6) steps that researchers carry out in this analysis technique. First, get closer to the data that has been obtained and its context (familiarisation). Second, identify and label the data. Third, group the codes into large patterns and themes. Fourth, select potential themes that can represent the data accurately. Fifth, define these themes. Sixth, present or report the findings data (Byrne, 2022).

Result and Discussion

Disguising identity as a victim recovery strategy

Dayah Dinniyah Darussalam was founded in 2012 in West Aceh Regency (Husna & Fitri, 2023). Not only does it accommodate victims of sexual violence, this *Dayah* also accommodates victims of other violence, such as Domestic Violence (KDRT), as well as victims of conflict. The majority of victims accommodated by Umi Hanisah are victims who come from lower middle economic class families, and/or orphans, both male and female. The victims' ages varied, from 7 years old to 23 years old. The victims of this violence also attended elementary school (SD) to junior high school (SMP) which are also located in the *Dayah* complex. However, apart from the victims in *Dayah*, the students studying at the two schools also came from children around *Dayah*. Based on observations made by researchers, all students in the *Dayah* environment are mixed together, making it difficult to distinguish their identities or what bad experiences they have experienced.

The mingling between victims and non-victims in the *Dayah* and school environments so far illustrates the existence of harmonization. Researchers assume that this could be realized partly because of efforts to disguise the victim's identity which were carried out on the authority of Umi Hanisah as the founder of *Dayah*. Based on the results of the interview, Umi Hanisah chose and implemented this strategy for two reasons. First, help the victim to adapt and feel comfortable with the new environment. Disguising the identity of victims of sexual violence plays an important role in their healing process. By protecting their privacy, this strategy creates a safe space for victims to accept their experiences without fear of judgment or scrutiny from those around them.

Second, help victims to recover from trauma. According to him, when the victim is comfortable, easily blends in, interacts as usual, then these are several important indicators for recovering from the victim's trauma. However, if the identity of 'victim' is attached to them, according to Umi Hanisah, it will not help the recovery process. Researchers observed that masking this identity on the one hand can reduce the risk of stigmatization and victimization against them, thereby allowing victims to rebuild their self-confidence. It also empowers them to regain control of their narrative and seek necessary support. Additionally, it can reduce anxiety and fear, creating an environment conducive to emotional recovery. Ultimately, by providing this protection of anonymity, victims are in a better position to focus on their mental and emotional well-being, thus contributing significantly to their healing journey.

The effects of identity disguise and communication

Based on observations of five (5) victims of sexual violence in *Dayah*, researchers found that almost none of the five students withdrew from the people around them. The students there live by mingling, interacting with each other. However, this strategy of disguising one's identity has the potential to have an influence when victims interact with *Dayah* leaders, teachers, other students, or even fellow victims. Victims of sexual violence whose identities are disguised often experience various adjustments in their interactions with the people around them. This process involves changes in social dynamics, changes in the group that protects them (*dayah*), and potential impacts on mental and emotional readiness when they return to life in their original environment.

Based on the results of interviews with two teachers, teacher A explained that all students at *Dayah* had no difficulty adapting. This was explained by teacher A as proof of the success of the *Dayah* in accommodating victims of violence. Even though teacher A does not know which students have experienced sexual violence, teacher A feels that he does not receive any different treatment when teaching students. This is because teacher A feels that there are no students who stand out personally or in behavior. On the other hand, teacher B also confirmed that while they were at *Dayah*, not a single student had to be given special treatment. For example, every morning they prepare food together, study together, and even play together. Researchers see that this type of interaction pattern can

work because all the elements in the *dayah* support each other, trust and respect each other.

This disguise of identity provides benefits at least in terms of communication. Referring to the Communication of Identity Theory, the process of disguising one's identity is at the personal layer, namely the victim knows the condition and feelings of the victim when they are in certain conditions. First, the victim's interaction with the *Dayah* administrator. The dominant pattern seen is the effort to build trust by the *Dayah* administrators towards the victims. According to Umi Hanisah, the process of disguising the victim's identity as a santri was the first step in being able to direct and build the victim's trust in the *Dayah*. The bad experiences that victims experience certainly affect their sense of trust in other people. On the other hand, this disguise of identity also helps Umi Hanisah to be careful in communicating, conveying information, etc. with victims and non-victim students. This disguise of identity also supports the *Dayah* as an educational institution, including a non-governmental organization that accommodates victims of violence, to be able to adapt to various policies issued by the *Dayah*. For example, learning materials, interaction rules in the *Dayah*, and so on while still paying attention to the victim's privacy and feelings of comfort. Moreover, this *Dayah* often holds various activities by inviting external parties, such as the National Commission on Violence Against Women, women's organizations, legal institutions, and others. The victim's student identity actually helped the victim when he had to come into contact with many people.

Second, the victim's interaction with other victims. Each victim is protected by information before the victim enters the *dayah*. This effort to maintain privacy is proven by the absence of special treatment, different interactions with fellow victims. After their identity is disguised, the victim may experience adjustments in their social interactions. According to the results of observations of the five victims and confirmed by interviews with Umi Hanisah, friends in the *Dayah* and external parties who attended the *Dayah* showed a high awareness of the need to protect the victims' privacy. Umi Hanisah also always reminds all the students and guests present, because it can affect their psychological conditions and interactions between them. Effective identity disguise is assumed to contribute to an overall sense of security and self-confidence. Apart from that, it also allows victims to be more honestly involved in their environment, continue to look for opportunities to recover, and actually form a mutual support movement for fellow victims.

Based on the findings, researchers see that this solidarity between victims illustrates the sisterhood movement. Hooks (2014) explains that sisterhood is a concept that refers to solidarity, support, and attachment between women, whether social, emotional, or political, often in the context of struggles for gender equality and justice. This emphasizes the importance of close relationships between women to support each other, understand and fight for women's rights. In the context of supporting fellow victims of sexual violence, sisterhood describes strong cooperation and empathy among victims of sexual violence. For example, support for fellow victims of sexual violence in *Dayah* can be demonstrated through supporting each other in developing the competencies of fellow students according to their interests and talents. This is in line with Umi Hanisah's spirit who wants to help victims to recover by equipping students or victims with various abilities so they can be independent. Collective peer support builds strong bonds between victims of sexual violence, and of course embodies the values of sisterhood. This can strengthen the sustainable recovery process (Srimulyani, 2016).

Third, the victim's interaction with students who are not victims of violence. The identity disguise applied by Umi Hanisah in this research showed a positive impact. For example, by creating a feeling of comfort within the victim when they have to interact with other people, especially non-victims. Although this needs to be explored again by exploring the perspective of the victim. However, based on direct observations by researchers, interactions between victims and non-victims are able to provide

opportunities for victims to build new relationships and connectivity. This may be difficult to achieve if the victim's identity is not hidden.

Fourth, the victim's interaction with the community in the surrounding environment. Apart from being a place for religious learning for Islamic students, *Dayah* is also a place for local people to deepen their religious knowledge. Disguising one's identity helps victims adapt to various forms of judgment and empathy from those around them. Based on interviews with Umi Hanisah and two teachers, the local community who were active in the *Dayah* area also supported the victims to recover without knowing the background of the cases experienced by the victims. This reflects the support and empathy from the surrounding community towards the victims and the *Dayah*.

Overlapping identities

In The Communication Theory of Identity (TCI) it is explained that a person's identity can be multi-layered and lies in communication. According to this theory, identity encompasses four distinct frameworks. First, personal identity, namely how a person views himself. Second, the identity applied, which is related to how the identity is applied when interacting. Third, relational, which is related to the relationship role played by a person. Fourth, communal, namely a person's membership in a group (Hecht & Phillips, 2021).

Personal identity in this research is related to how the victim views and identifies himself. Victims who have positive and negative perspectives are greatly influenced by their past experiences and how the victim navigates these experiences. Then regarding the identity applied, before the victim enters the *dayah* there is an identity of 'victim' attached to him. This identity influences their actions, behavior and performance when interacting with other people. Regarding relational identity, this research is reflected in the identity formed by Umi Hanisah with the aim of having a positive impact on victims when building relationships with the *Dayah* administrators, fellow victims, and with non-victim santri. Finally, the santri identity generalized by Umi Hanisah has implications for the santri at a personal level, social groups within the *Dayah* environment, the surrounding community, and external parties connected with the *Dayah*. This pattern explains the communal identity that exists in the *Dayah*.

Although on the one hand disguise of identity helps victims to interact and recover, on the other hand, the four identity frameworks described above have the potential to overlap and even conflict with each other. The most visible impact is a gap in a person's identity. When these identity frameworks overlap or conflict, individuals may experience a loss of identity, leading to internal dissonance, emotional distress, and challenges faced at the interpersonal level (Wehrman & Abendschein, 2023).

The identity of '*santri*' assigned to the victim plays an important role in the victim's affiliation. However, if it is associated with negative impacts, namely internal dissonance, the victim has the potential to experience inner conflict related to beliefs about himself, which has an impact on his psychology. Apart from that, disguised identity is also considered to trigger emotional stress (Ihsan, 2018; Nugraha et al., 2020). Even though the student's identity was not chosen by the victim, it needs to be further investigated to see whether this identity does not cause feelings of alienation or inner conflict with himself. Then, every victim of sexual violence has different challenges to recover. Although on the one hand the strategy of disguising one's identity is assumed to help the victim, disguising one's identity also has the potential to make it difficult for the victim to navigate their true identity, or even their own self-concept.

Disguising one's identity as a form of resistance against discrimination

This disguise of identity is a form of Umi Hanisah's authority in ensuring the confidentiality of the victim's identity, helping to restore the victim with a new identity, as well as a form of resistance to discrimination against victims of sexual violence and including discrimination against the *dayah*. Based on the interview, Umi Hanisah

explained that the existence of the *dayah* was once associated with a negative stigma, which resulted in the existence of the *dayah* being rejected by the surrounding community. This rejection was based on the community's argument that victims who were in contact with disgrace should not be accommodated because it also had the potential to tarnish the good name of their village. However, in line with the social dynamics that occur, *Dayah* Dinniyah Darussalam still exists and continues the struggle, especially accommodating and providing a forum for treatment and recovery for victims to this day.

Disguising the identity of victims of sexual violence is a complex strategy that has both positive and negative impacts. However, on the other hand, amidst the stigma attached to victims and women, disguise of identity actually plays a big role in fighting this discrimination. Based on the findings in this research, the power to disguise the victim's identity is used as a tool to fight bad stigma, especially towards victims. When disguising the victim's identity, Umi Hanisah assessed that various parties began to focus on providing support to victims with student identities without attaching them to stereotypes, or even victim blaming behavior. Furthermore, this pattern of disguising one's identity also helps the *dayah* to continue to exist amidst the negative experiences and prejudices that also befell the *dayah*. According to Umi Hanisah, disguised identity makes it possible for victims to be more open with various parties. Moreover, the *Dayah* often holds educational-based activities, which also bring in new people. Disguising the identity of victims of sexual violence in *Dayah* can be an important strategy in restoring victims' self-confidence and at the same time fighting discrimination.

Conclusion

This research focuses on one of the *dayah*, a popular term in Aceh which refers to traditional Islamic boarding schools, which were established to provide a safe space for victims of sexual violence. Safe spaces in the realm of religious-based educational institutions like this are rarely found in Aceh. *Dayah*, especially in Aceh, has often been associated as a conservative educational institution. However, *Dayah* Dinniyah Darussalam is present as an Islamic boarding school with a progressive image and based on gender justice, even contributing to the creation of a new definition, that Islamic boarding schools are not conservative and exclusive educational institutions, but are inclusive. The Islamic boarding school, which was originally intended as a place of religious learning for children affected by conflict, has now also become a place for assisting victims of sexual violence in West Aceh. The existence of this Dayah and religious-based institutions can be used as a recommendation for accommodating and implementing programs to handle cases of sexual violence.

Victims of sexual violence whose identities are disguised experience many adjustments in their interactions with the people around them. These adjustments cover various aspects of their lives, including social interactions, seeking and forming support, and even fighting against various forms of discrimination. On the one hand, disguise of identity provides an opportunity for victims to rebuild self-confidence, affiliate and recover. However, on the other hand, further research is still needed regarding the challenges faced by victims after their identity is disguised. Therefore, the researcher recommends that future researchers study the challenges and negative impacts of overlapping identities experienced by victims.

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