

Which Predictor is the Most Important? Examining the Unique Contribution of Violence Perception Dimension against the Prevalence of Digital Violence

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| <p>Submitted: 2025-10-12</p> <p>Published: 2026-13-01</p> <p>Keywords: Digital Violence, Gender-Based Violence, Sexual Harassment Perception</p> <p>Copyright holder: © Author/s (2026)</p> <p>This article is under:</p>  <p>How to cite: Rakhmawati, D., Ismanto, H. S., Julienjatiningsih, J., & Suyati, T. (2026). Which Predictor is the Most Important? Examining the Unique Contribution of Violence Perception Dimension against the Prevalence of Digital Violence. <i>Bulletin of Counseling and Psychotherapy</i>, 8(1). https://doi.org/10.51214/002026081697000</p> <p>Published by: Kuras Institute</p> <p>E-ISSN: 2656-1050</p> | <p>ABSTRACT: This study analyzed the influence of different dimensions of gender-based violence perceptions on the prevalence of digital violence (DV) among university students. The research background rests on the growing threat of online violence, which may be shaped by individual awareness levels. The research instrument specifically accommodated four forms of online gender-based violence: digital sexual harassment, violence based on physical appearance, violence based on gender roles, and anti-feminist violence. The study employs a cross-sectional design and involves 414 students who actively use social media as respondents. Multiple regression analysis (F-test) shows that the four dimensions of perception, namely perceptions of sexual harassment, gender-based violence, physical appearance violence, and anti-feminist violence simultaneously exert a significant effect on digital violence ($\text{Sig.} = 0.001$). These results confirm the validity of the predictive model. However, partial testing (T-test) reveals that only perceptions of sexual harassment significantly and positively influence digital violence ($B = +0.304$; $\text{Sig.} = 0.002$). The positive coefficient reflects a reporting bias: respondents with higher sensitivity to sexual harassment tend to define and report a broader range of online incidents as violence. Meanwhile, perceptions of gender-based violence, physical appearance violence, and anti-feminist violence do not provide unique predictive contributions. The study concludes that, in the context of digital violence, sexual harassment awareness is the most dominant factor. This recommendation suggests that online violence prevention programs and policies specifically focus on strengthening understanding and coping strategies related to digital sexual harassment.</p> |
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INTRODUCTION

Gender-based online violence has emerged as a significant problem in the digital era, driven by the rapid evolution of information and communication technologies. The internet and social media platforms strongly facilitate various forms of online violence. Online violence manifests in forms such as cyberbullying, pornography, and hate speech, enabled by the anonymity and reach of digital platforms (Bonilla-Bravo, 2019; Cenedese & Wojtyna, 2021). Digital environments spread violent content quickly, causing social shame and psychological harm, as seen in cases like the “Werribee DVD” and Justine Sacco’s tweet (Bonilla-Bravo, 2019).

Social media platforms such as TikTok, Facebook, and Twitter serve as arenas for expressing and reinforcing violence, often reflecting and intensifying existing socio-political conflicts, as shown in case studies from Colombia and the Middle East (Morales et al., 2023). Cultural context and histories of violence shape how users experience and perceive violence on digital platforms. For instance, the normalization of violence among Costa Rican youth highlights how social media channels expose and legitimize violent behavior (García Martínez et al., 2024). In conflict zones such as Israel, Palestine and Syria, digital platforms incite and reproduce violence, often through memes and viral videos (Morales et al., 2023). Perceptions of the internet as a lawless space escalate conflicts, as perpetrators feel shielded from legal consequences (Bonilla-Bravo, 2019).

Social media has become integral to human life, especially for adolescents. Adults manipulate adolescents on social media for financial gain or sexual gratification, leading to online violence (Rakhmawati et al., 2024). Educational interventions and legal protections play a crucial role in safeguarding vulnerable groups such as adolescents from risks posed by online platforms (Syahda & Ramaiah, 2024). Digital spaces facilitate sexual violence, including image-based harassment, voyeurism, and non-consensual distribution of intimate images. Perpetrators exploit anonymity and global reach to intensify these acts (Bedi, 2022; Verma & Gupta, 2023). Many countries lack specific laws addressing digital gender violence, and existing laws often fail to account for the unique nature of online offenses. These legal gaps leave victims vulnerable and perpetrators unaccountable (Bedi, 2022). Victims of online gender violence (OGV) often suffer severe psychological distress, including fear, anxiety, and depression. The pervasive nature of online harassment produces long-term emotional and social consequences (Duche-Pérez et al., 2024; Eleanora et al., 2023).

Online Gender Violence (OGV) specifically targets individuals based on gender or intensifies harm through discriminatory norms and expectations. OGV often extends offline gender violence and aims to silence, shame, or degrade victims, particularly women. Acts of OGV include sending unsolicited obscene images, issuing rape threats, and spreading damaging rumors (Güneş, 2024; Hubbard, 2023). Digital environments facilitate abusive behaviors ranging from stalking to image-based sexual harassment (Ging, 2023). Victims, especially women, experience significant psychological pressure and social isolation (Hubbard L, 2023; Streiner, 1998). Such violence restricts women's participation as digital citizens, creating a human rights crisis (Ging, 2023).

Prevalence refers to the proportion of individuals experiencing OGV at a given time. Researchers use prevalence to measure the scale of the problem among student populations (Olweus, 1989; Streiner, 1998). Variations in prevalence data arise from methodological differences such as study design and population characteristics, which affect reliability (Alcantud Marín et al., 2016; Khan, 2023). High prevalence rates indicate systemic problems in educational environments and demand comprehensive strategies to address these gaps (Chitsaz & Kumar, 2019). Students' perceptions of OGV involve their understanding of knowledge gaps or overlaps, which vary based on individual experiences and educational backgrounds (Chitsaz & Kumar, 2019). Students' perceptions of the causes and severity of OGV affect their reactions as victims, witnesses, or contributors to prevention initiatives. Understanding student perceptions guides the development of effective educational interventions and support systems to reduce OGV's impact (Chitsaz & Kumar, 2019).

Beyond psychological harm, victims face social isolation and economic consequences, as online harassment disrupts professional and personal lives (Çalış Duman, 2023). Limited awareness of digital footprints and data security increases vulnerability to online violence. Education and awareness campaigns empower women to protect themselves online (Eleanora et al., 2023; Julian & Asmawati, 2024). Institutions should enforce zero-tolerance policies against cyberbullying and provide psychological support services for affected students (Arif et al., 2024). Victims often lack knowledge about reporting cyberbullying or requesting the removal of harmful content (E. Notar et al., 2013). Social stigma and fear of retaliation discourage victims from seeking help, perpetuating

cycles of abuse (Hidayah AN, 2022). The shift to online activity has increased exposure to digital spaces where OGV occurs (Arawinda, 2022; Suryanti & Muttaqin, 2023). Gender-insensitive health services and weak support systems during the pandemic further complicated efforts to reduce OGV (Suryanti & Muttaqin, 2023). Generation Z, with the highest internet penetration in Indonesia, remains highly vulnerable to OGV. Despite their digital nativity, they often normalize OGV in casual contexts such as jokes, undermining the seriousness of the issue (Setyaningsih et al., 2024).

Improving digital literacy among university students is essential to empower them to recognize and respond effectively to OGV (Setyaningsih et al., 2024). Research on OGV in Indonesia, particularly among university students, remains limited. Most studies focus on offline violence or general digital security without emphasizing gender dimensions. A comprehensive understanding of prevalence and student perceptions of OGV is crucial for designing effective prevention and response strategies. Therefore, this study aims to conduct an initial investigation into OGV among university students, examining its frequency and exploring how students interpret and respond to it. A comprehensive understanding of the prevalence (incidence rate) and students' perceptions of online gender violence is crucial for formulating effective prevention and response strategies.

Study Aim and Hypothesis

This study examined perceptions of digital sexual harassment, violence based on physical appearance, violence based on gender roles, and anti-feminist violence as predictors of the prevalence of online gender-based violence. The hypothesis states that these four perceptions simultaneously predict the prevalence of online gender-based violence.

METHODS

Design

The correlational design research used a cross-sectional survey to identify how perceptions of digital sexual harassment, violence based on physical appearance, violence based on gender roles, and anti-feminist violence function as simultaneous predictors of online gender-based violence.

Participants

Participants consisted of 415, including 98 male students and 317 female students. Researchers selected participants using a purposive sampling method. The selected sample: students aged 18–24 years in Semarang, active users of social media: frequently posting regularly, frequently giving likes, comments, replies, and interacting with other users' content, opening the application, and checking the feed daily or multiple times a day, utilizing features such as stories, reels, or live broadcasts.

Instruments

Data collection relied on surveys, which were analyzed with statistical methods to identify patterns and correlations. The research instrument specifically accommodated four forms of online gender-based violence: digital sexual harassment, violence based on physical appearance, violence based on gender roles, and anti-feminist violence (Martínez-Bacaicoa et al., 2024). This design enabled exploration of demographic variables and student perceptions of online gender-based violence (Rusyidi et al., 2019).

Data Analysis

Researchers tested the hypothesis using quantitative multiple linear regression. Prior to analysis, the researchers conducted classical assumption tests, including normality, linearity, and multicollinearity. They validated and tested the reliability of the measurement scales before use. Data were processed with SPSS Statistics 25 for Windows.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The classical assumption tests for multiple linear regression indicate that the residual normality test produced $K-SZ = .735$ and $n.sign = .663$ ($p > .05$), confirming normal data distribution. The linearity test yielded F deviation = 1.676 and $n.sign = .99$ ($p > .05$), indicating linear data. The multicollinearity test reported tolerance values for all three variables greater than 10 and VIF values less than 10.00, confirming the absence of multicollinearity.

Hypothetical testing

Table 1. ANOVA

| Model | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|-------|-------------------|
| Regression | 399.418 | 4 | 99.854 | 4.584 | .001 ^b |
| Residual | 8930.944 | 410 | 21.783 | | |
| Total | 9330.361 | 414 | | | |

Table 1 reports the significance values for the variables, starting from perceptions of digital sexual harassment, gender-based violence, physical appearance violence, and anti-feminist violence in relation to the prevalence of online violence. The output shows $sig = 0.001 < 0.05$ and $F = 4.584$. These results indicate that perceptions of digital sexual harassment, gender-based violence, physical appearance violence, and anti-feminist violence simultaneously influence the prevalence of online violence.

Table 2. Summary of Each Indicator Calculation

| Independent variable indicators | Regression coefficient | t-count | Sig. | Effects | Remarks |
|---|------------------------|---------|-------|---------------|-----------------|
| Sexual harassment perception | +0.304 | 3.043 | 0.002 | Significant | Positive effect |
| Gender-based violence perception | +0.200 | 1.849 | 0.065 | Insignificant | Sig.>0.05 |
| Physical appearance violence perception | +0.146 | -1.523 | 0.129 | Insignificant | Sig.>0.05 |
| Anti-feminist violence perception | -0.107 | -1.055 | 0.292 | Insignificant | Sig.>0.05 |

Table 2 presents the indicator-level analysis. Perceptions of Digital Sexual Harassment: $Sig = 0.002 < 0.05$. This variable significantly affects the prevalence of online violence. The regression coefficient is positive (+0.304), meaning that higher perceptions of digital sexual harassment among respondents correspond to higher reported prevalence of online violence. Perceptions of Gender-Based Violence: $Sig = 0.065 > 0.05$. This variable does not significantly affect the prevalence of online violence. Perceptions of Physical Appearance Violence: $Sig = 0.129 > 0.05$. This variable does not significantly affect the prevalence of online violence. Perceptions of Anti-Feminist Violence: $Sig = 0.292 > 0.05$. This variable does not significantly affect the prevalence of online violence.

Discussion

The findings show that the variables collectively predict the prevalence of digital violence (Sig. = 0.001). However, when tested individually, only one predictor, perceptions of sexual harassment, significantly contributes to the prevalence of digital violence (Sig. = 0.002). The positive effect (+0.304) indicates that respondents with high sensitivity or awareness of sexual harassment tend to report or experience more incidents of digital violence. Adolescents with heightened perceptions are more likely to classify online behaviors (such as unwanted sexting, digital catcalling, or sexual comments) as “violence” or “harassment,” which increases prevalence reports. High awareness also makes them more attentive to boundary-violating online behaviors. Although descriptive levels of perceptions of gender-based violence, physical appearance violence, and anti-feminist violence are high, these indicators do not uniquely or significantly predict the prevalence of digital violence. This suggests that respondents primarily recognize and report issues directly related to sexuality and harassment rather than broader gender-based or ideological violence.

These findings support the hypothesis that heightened perception and awareness may act as protective factors, effectively reducing actual incidents of digital violence and lowering prevalence reports. Highly aware individuals tend to behave cautiously and selectively online. Those who still experience incidents apply broader definitions of violence when reporting. Elevated awareness fosters careful online behavior, reduces exposure to digital violence, and encourages preventive actions while avoiding risky interactions (Katkar et al., 2025; Pan et al., 2024). Individuals with high awareness often develop nuanced understandings of digital violence, leading to broader definitions and more detailed reporting (Fitzek et al., 2024). Higher levels of digital literacy and resilience, common among these individuals, improve risk navigation and strengthen protective behaviors (Pan et al., 2024). Awareness programs and educational interventions expand understanding of digital violence and influence how individuals perceive and report incidents (Seo & Ciani, 2014). Support systems, including family and educational environments, play a crucial role in fostering awareness and resilience, thereby reducing the impact of digital violence (Pan et al., 2024; Freed et al., 2025).

This positive interpretation is critical. The positive regression coefficient implies that greater sensitivity or understanding of sexual harassment corresponds to higher reported prevalence of digital violence. Victimology and reporting bias explain these results. Victimology emphasizes the role of individual characteristics in experiencing violence. Studies show that younger individuals and women report higher levels of technology-facilitated sexual violence (Martínez-Bacaicoa et al., 2024b; Monteiro et al., 2024). Widespread harassment culture and social norms influence reporting behavior. For example, many victims do not report incidents due to a lack of knowledge about reporting procedures (Nursaidah, 2025). Reporting bias also plays a role: many victims, especially women, underreport experiences due to stigma or fear of disbelief. One study found that only 30% of respondents reported their experiences to authorities (Nursaidah, 2025). As individuals become more sensitive to harassment issues, they are more likely to recognize and report experiences, leading to higher reported prevalence (Benítez-Hidalgo et al., 2025; Powell & Henry, 2019).

Respondents with high perceptions of sexual harassment tend to have lower thresholds for identifying online interactions as violence or harassment. Ambiguous or borderline behaviors (such as digital catcalling or sexually nuanced body shaming) are categorized as “violence” by this group, statistically increasing prevalence reports. Individuals aware of harassment risks scrutinize online interactions more closely, leading to higher classification of behaviors as violent (Reed et al., 2020). Actions such as digital catcalling and body shaming are often interpreted as harassment by highly aware individuals, contributing to increased prevalence statistics (Reed et al., 2020). Studies show that most dating app users experience sexual harassment, with three-quarters reporting online victimization (Wolbers et al., 2022). Reported prevalence of cybersexual harassment varies across studies, influenced by definitions and measurement tools (Reed et al., 2020). Conversely, some argue that heightened perception may cause overreporting, where benign interactions are

misclassified as harassment, complicating accurate prevalence assessments. This perspective highlights the need for standardized definitions and measures in research to assess the scope of online harassment accurately (Bailey & Dunn, 2024).

In online environments, violence often carries explicit sexual nuances as the most damaging form of attack (e.g., revenge porn, doxing with sexual threats, or sexualized appearance-based harassment). Consequently, perceptions of sexual harassment uniquely explain the largest share of variance in digital violence, while broader dimensions such as gender-based violence or anti-feminist violence lose predictive strength. Respondents tend to interpret digital violence primarily as threats to their bodies and sexuality, and only secondarily as gender-based or ideological issues.

Implications

These findings make an important theoretical contribution by identifying that, in studies of digital literacy and gender-based violence, specific perceptions of sexual harassment are the most relevant factor for predicting reports of violence in digital spaces. Practically, the results suggest that prevention and digital education programs should not only focus on general gender-based violence but also deepen definitions and mechanisms of digital sexual harassment. Because high perception correlates with high reporting, interventions must include stress management and effective coping strategies for highly sensitive individuals so that awareness does not become a source of increased distress.

Limitations and Further Research

This study has limitations due to the implementation of a cross-sectional design. Therefore, causal conclusions must be interpreted cautiously. Future research should adopt longitudinal designs to test the hypothesis that heightened perception moderates or mediates experiences of violence over time. Researchers should also conduct qualitative analyses to understand why respondents conceptually separate dimensions of gender-based and anti-feminist violence from perceptions of sexual harassment in their experiences of digital violence.

CONCLUSION

The study analyzed the influence of different dimensions of gender-based violence perceptions on the prevalence of online gender violence by integrating descriptive findings and multiple regression analysis. Overall, the regression model testing the influence of perception dimensions (sexual harassment, gender-based violence, physical appearance, and anti-feminist violence) on digital violence is simultaneously significant. This result means that the four perception factors, when considered together, validly predict the prevalence of digital violence. However, descriptive findings reveal an interesting contradiction: although respondents generally report high perceptions of violence (category T across all dimensions), the overall prevalence of online gender violence falls into the very low category (SR). This pattern suggests that heightened awareness of violence issues may act as a protective factor, effectively suppressing the incidence levels experienced by respondents. When tested individually, the analysis shows that only perceptions of sexual harassment significantly and positively influence digital violence. The positive direction indicates that greater sensitivity or understanding of sexual harassment increases the likelihood of identifying and reporting online experiences as digital violence. Meanwhile, three other perception variables, gender-based violence, physical appearance violence, and anti-feminist violence, do not significantly influence digital violence when tested individually. These results highlight the dominance of sexual harassment perception as the strongest single predictor of digital violence prevalence, likely because digital threats often centre on sexuality.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

DR, HSI, JJ, TS agree the final version of this article.

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