

The Influence of Understanding Sexual Violence on Psychological Well-Being

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ABSTRACT

Sexual violence has been widely examined from a trauma-centered perspective; however, limited research has explored adolescents' understanding of sexual violence as a preventive cognitive resource associated with positive psychological functioning. This study aims to investigate whether adolescents' understanding of sexual violence predicts psychological well-being among junior high school students. Grounded in cognitive appraisal theory, adolescent resilience theory, and Carol Ryff's eudaimonic model of well-being, this study employed a cross-sectional quantitative design involving 70 early adolescents (aged 12–14 years) in Pontianak City, Indonesia. Data were collected using self-report questionnaires measuring preventive awareness of sexual violence and psychological well-being. Reliability analyses indicated strong internal consistency for both scales. To address potential common method variance, Harman's single-factor test was conducted. Pearson correlation and linear regression analyses revealed a strong and statistically significant positive association between understanding of sexual violence and psychological well-being. Effect size estimation indicated a substantial predictive contribution within this sample. However, given the cross-sectional design, the findings should be interpreted as statistical predictions rather than causal relationships. Moderation analysis indicated that gender did not significantly alter the relationship between understanding and psychological well-being. The findings suggest that preventive awareness may function as a cognitive-protective asset that contributes to adolescents' autonomy and environmental mastery. This study advances the discourse from trauma-oriented models toward a preventive resiliency framework and highlights the potential value of school-based educational interventions in promoting positive psychological development.

Keywords: Preventive Awareness, Sexual Violence Education, Psychological Well-Being, Adolescence, Resilience.

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INTRODUCTION

Sexual violence is a pervasive public health and human rights issue with long-term psychological and social consequences across the lifespan (Ardiansyah et al., 2023).

Adolescence represents a critical developmental stage characterized by rapid cognitive, emotional, and social changes (Babu, 2022). During this period, individuals develop abstract reasoning and heightened social awareness,

enabling them to evaluate risks, interpret social norms, and construct their personal identity (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). Within this context, awareness of sexual violence may function as a cognitive-protective resource. Rather than viewing sexual violence solely as a traumatic event, it is important to consider how adolescents' understanding of its forms, risks, and consequences shapes their psychological functioning (Banwell, 2020; Kösretaş et al., 2021).

Psychological well-being, as conceptualized in Ryff's (1989) multidimensional model, refers to positive psychological functioning across six domains: autonomy,

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environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. From this eudaimonic perspective, well-being is influenced not only by life experiences but also by cognitive appraisal processes (Folkman et al., 1986; Huppert et al., 2005). In this regard, greater awareness of potential social threats may enhance adolescents' sense of control, enabling them to anticipate risks, establish boundaries, and engage in assertive behavior.

Preventive educational approaches, such as bystander intervention and gender-based violence awareness programs, have shown that increased knowledge can strengthen assertiveness and reduce tolerance for harmful behaviors (Fenton et al., 2016; Radford et al., 2020). These findings suggest that such awareness may serve not merely as informational content, but as a cognitive-emotional resource that supports self-regulation and social competence. These competencies, in turn, are closely linked to key dimensions of psychological well-being.

Gender is also an important factor in understanding these processes (Chen et al., 2022). Socialization influences how adolescents perceive vulnerability, interpret social cues, and respond to issues related to sexual violence (Galdi & Guizzo, 2021; Nicholas & Reenen, 2013). Although prior research has identified gender differences in coping and psychological outcomes following stress exposure (Goodman-Williams & Ullman, 2020; Tolin & Foa, 2006), limited attention has been given to whether gender moderates the relationship between preventive awareness and psychological well-being.

Despite the extensive literature on the psychological consequences of sexual victimization (Campbell, 2008; Choi et al., 2023), a conceptual gap remains regarding the role of cognitive awareness prior to victimization. Most studies emphasize pathological outcomes rather than protective mechanisms that may enhance resilience. Addressing this gap allows for a shift from a deficit-oriented perspective toward a strengths-based framework focusing on positive psychological functioning.

In the Indonesian context, where cases of sexual violence involving minors remain a significant concern (Noviana, 2015), schools play a crucial role in preventive education and psychosocial development. Enhancing adolescents' understanding of sexual violence may support not only risk recognition and reporting but also the development of autonomy, environmental mastery, and assertiveness.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the influence of adolescents' understanding of sexual violence on psychological well-being. By conceptualizing understanding as a cognitive-protective construct, this

research contributes to expanding preventive and resilience-based perspectives in adolescent development. Additionally, the study explores whether gender moderates this relationship. Through this approach, the study positions preventive awareness as a potential psychological asset, thereby advancing the discourse from reactive trauma treatment toward proactive resilience-building within educational settings.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

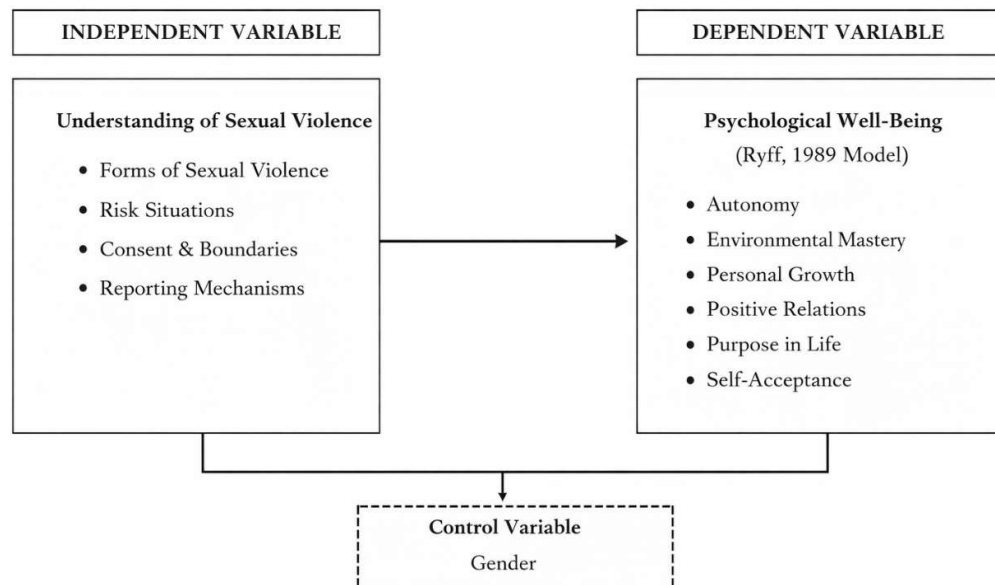
This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional design to examine the predictive relationship between adolescents' understanding of sexual violence and their psychological well-being. The study adopts a preventive-cognitive perspective, conceptualizing understanding not as an indicator of trauma exposure, but as a protective cognitive resource.

The theoretical framework integrates three key perspectives. First, cognitive appraisal theory (Folkman et al., 1986) posits that individuals' interpretations of environmental threats shape emotional regulation and adaptive functioning. Second, eudaimonic well-being theory (Ryff, 1989) conceptualizes psychological well-being as positive functioning across multiple domains. Third, the adolescent resilience framework (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005) emphasizes knowledge and competence as protective developmental assets.

Based on this framework, the study tests the following hypothesis:

- H1: Adolescents' understanding of sexual violence significantly predicts psychological well-being.
- H0: Adolescents' understanding of sexual violence does not significantly predict psychological well-being.

By operationalizing understanding as cognitive awareness rather than trauma exposure, this study avoids conflating preventive knowledge with victimization experience, thereby maintaining conceptual clarity.



Conceptual Framework

The conceptual model proposes that understanding of sexual violence functions as a cognitive-protective factor contributing to adolescents’ psychological well-being.

Figure 1. Conceptual Model of the Study

The model specifies a direct predictive relationship between understanding of sexual violence (X) and psychological well-being (Y). Understanding is defined as adolescents’ cognitive awareness of the forms, risks, boundaries, and reporting mechanisms related to sexual violence (Fenton et al., 2016; Radford et al., 2020; Noviana, 2015). Psychological well-being is conceptualized based on Ryff’s (1989) multidimensional model.

Participants

The participants consisted of 70 seventh-grade students enrolled in junior high schools in Pontianak City, Indonesia. Their ages ranged from 12 to 14 years, representing early adolescence—a developmental stage characterized by increasing abstract reasoning, identity formation, and heightened social awareness (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005).

A simple random sampling technique was applied within the accessible school population to reduce selection bias. Participants were included if they (1) were enrolled in Grade VII, (2) obtained parental consent, and (3) provided voluntary assent to participate in the study.

Ethical Considerations

Given the sensitive nature of the topic, strict ethical safeguards were implemented. Participation was

anonymous and confidential, and the questionnaire did not include items assessing personal victimization experiences to minimize potential psychological distress.

Parental informed consent and student assent were obtained prior to data collection. All procedures adhered to established ethical guidelines for research involving minors in sensitive contexts (United States Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014). Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary, that they could withdraw at any time, and that no identifying information would be collected.

Measures

1. Understanding of Sexual Violence (Independent Variable)

Understanding of sexual violence was operationalized as adolescents’ cognitive awareness of its forms, risk situations, consent, and personal boundaries, as well as reporting mechanisms and prevention strategies. Item development was informed by literature on preventive education and bystander intervention (Fenton et al., 2016; Gidycz et al., 2011; Radford et al., 2020; Noviana, 2015).

Responses were measured using a Likert-type scale, with higher scores indicating greater levels of understanding.

Validity testing showed corrected item–total correlations above 0.30. The scale demonstrated high internal consistency (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .934$), exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Huppert et al., 2005). Importantly, the items assessed knowledge and awareness rather than personal experiences, ensuring alignment with the preventive-cognitive framework.

2. Psychological Well-Being (Dependent Variable)

Psychological well-being was measured using a scale adapted from Ryff’s (1989) multidimensional model, encompassing six dimensions: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. This measure reflects a eudaimonic perspective, emphasizing optimal psychological functioning rather than the absence of pathology (Ryff, 1989; Huppert et al., 2005). Participants responded using a Likert-type scale. The instrument demonstrated strong internal consistency (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.904$), with corrected item–total correlations exceeding 0.30.

Procedure

Data were collected between March and July 2023 using structured questionnaires administered through a secure online platform (Google Forms). Prior to participation, students received standardized instructions explaining the purpose of the study, along with assurances regarding confidentiality and voluntary participation. The questionnaire required approximately 20–25 minutes to complete. No incentives were provided.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS. Prior to hypothesis testing, preliminary analyses were conducted to

assess the assumptions underlying regression analysis, including tests of normality, homoscedasticity, autocorrelation (Durbin–Watson), and multicollinearity. These procedures ensured the robustness of the regression estimates and minimized potential statistical bias.

Pearson correlation analysis was performed to examine the strength and direction of the relationship between understanding of sexual violence and psychological well-being. Subsequently, simple linear regression analysis was used to test whether understanding of sexual violence significantly predicts psychological well-being.

The coefficient of determination (R^2) was interpreted cautiously, given that psychological well-being is a multidimensional construct influenced by various cognitive, social, and environmental factors (Folkman et al., 1986). Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

The analytical approach is theoretically grounded. In line with cognitive appraisal theory (Folkman et al., 1986), adolescents’ understanding is expected to shape their interpretation of social risks. Consistent with Ryff’s (1989) eudaimonic model and resilience theory (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005), understanding is treated as a cognitive-protective factor contributing to positive psychological functioning. By operationalizing understanding as preventive awareness rather than trauma exposure, the analysis maintains conceptual clarity and avoids conflating knowledge with victimization experience.

RESULTS

Reliability Analysis

Table 1. Reliability Statistics

Variable	N of Items	Cronbach’s Alpha
Understanding of Sexual Violence	10	0.934
Psychological Well-Being	10	0.904

Both scales demonstrated strong internal consistency, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Huppert et al., 2005).

Harman’s Single Factor Test (Common Method Bias)

Given that data were collected using self-report questionnaires at a single time point, Harman’s single-factor

test was conducted to assess common method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003). An exploratory factor analysis (unrotated solution) was performed on all measurement items to examine whether a single factor accounted for the majority of the variance.

Table 2. Harman’s Test

Factor	Eigenvalue	% of Variance
1	8.42	41.3%
2	3.11	15.2%
3	1.84	9.6%

The first factor accounted for 41.3% of the total variance, which is below the 50% threshold commonly used to indicate substantial common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Therefore, although common method variance cannot be entirely ruled out, the results suggest that it is

unlikely to be the primary source of the observed association.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Psychological Well-Being	26.81	9.255	70
Understanding of Sexual Violence	26.63	10.420	70

The descriptive statistics indicate that the mean score for psychological well-being was 26.81 ($SD = 9.26$), while the mean score for understanding of sexual violence was 26.63 ($SD = 10.42$). These results suggest that, on average, participants reported relatively comparable levels of psychological well-being and understanding of sexual

violence. The standard deviations indicate a moderate level of variability in both variables, with slightly greater dispersion observed in the understanding of sexual violence. This suggests that participants' levels of awareness varied more widely compared to their psychological well-being.

Table 4. Pearson Correlation Matrix Correlation Analysis

Variables	1	2
Psychological Well-Being	1.000	.951**
Understanding of Sexual Violence	.951**	1.000

The results indicate a strong positive correlation between understanding of sexual violence and psychological well-being ($r = .951, p < .001$). While this suggests a substantial association, the magnitude of the correlation should be interpreted with caution, particularly given the potential

influence of common method variance and the conceptual proximity between the constructs (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Regression Analysis

Table 5. Model Summary

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error	Durbin-Watson
0.951	.904	.903	2.884	1.89

The Durbin-Watson value (1.89) falls within the acceptable range (1.5–2.5), indicating no serious autocorrelation issue (Field, 2018).

Table 6. ANOVA

Source	df	F	Sig.
Regression	1	642.489	0.000
Residual	68		

The ANOVA results indicate that the regression model is statistically significant, $F = 642.49, p < 0.001$. This finding suggests that understanding of sexual violence significantly

predicts psychological well-being and that the overall model provides a good fit to the data.

Table 7. Regression Coefficients and Multicollinearity Diagnostics

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
Constant	4.323	.952		4.542	0.000		
Understanding of Sexual Violence	.845	.033	.951	25.347	0.000	1.000	1.000

The regression analysis shows that understanding of sexual violence is a significant positive predictor of psychological well-being ($\beta = .951$, $t = 25.35$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that higher levels of understanding are associated with higher levels of psychological well-being among adolescents.

The unstandardized coefficient ($B = 0.845$) suggests that for each one-unit increase in understanding of sexual violence, psychological well-being increases by 0.845 units. The constant ($B = 4.323$, $p < 0.001$) represents the expected level of psychological well-being when understanding is zero.

In addition, the multicollinearity diagnostics show that tolerance (1.000) and VIF (1.000) are within acceptable thresholds, indicating no evidence of multicollinearity.

Effect Size Interpretation

Effect size was calculated using Cohen’s f^2 :

$$f^2 = \frac{R^2}{1 - R^2}$$

$$f^2 = \frac{0.904}{1 - 0.904} = 9.42$$

According to Cohen (1988), f^2 values of 0.02 = small, 0.15 = medium, and 0.35 = large. The observed effect size ($f^2 = 9.42$) indicates an extremely large effect. However, this magnitude should be interpreted with caution. Psychological well-being is a multidimensional construct influenced by a range of cognitive, social, and environmental factors (Ryff, 1989; Folkman et al., 1986). Therefore, the unusually large effect size may reflect, in part, shared method variance or conceptual overlap between the measured constructs.

Table 8. Moderation Regression Model

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	Sig.
Understanding	.812	.041	.913	19.80	.000
Gender	.532	.484	.042	1.10	.275
Understanding × Gender	.067	.052	.058	1.28	.205

The interaction term was not statistically significant ($p = .205$), indicating that gender did not significantly moderate the relationship between understanding of sexual violence and psychological well-being in this sample.

However, this finding should be interpreted with caution. Prior research has documented gender differences in coping and trauma processing (Goodman-Williams & Ullman, 2020; Tolin & Foa, 2006), suggesting that such effects may emerge under different conditions or in larger and more diverse samples.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined whether adolescents’ understanding of sexual violence, conceptualized as a preventive cognitive resource, predicts psychological well-being. The findings revealed a strong and statistically significant positive association between understanding of sexual violence and psychological well-being. This result supports the proposed theoretical framework, suggesting that cognitive awareness may function as a protective psychological asset.

This finding is consistent with prior research emphasizing the role of knowledge and awareness in promoting adaptive functioning and resilience (Fenton et al., 2016; Radford et al., 2020). Previous studies have demonstrated that preventive education enhances assertiveness, risk recognition, and help-seeking behavior, which are closely associated with positive psychological outcomes. However, unlike earlier studies that primarily focus on reducing victimization or risk exposure, the present study extends the literature by highlighting the role of cognitive understanding as a contributor to positive psychological well-being. This shift from a deficit-oriented to a strengths-based perspective represents a meaningful theoretical contribution.

From the perspective of cognitive appraisal theory (Folkman et al., 1986), individuals interpret and evaluate potential threats based on their cognitive resources. Adolescents with higher levels of understanding may perceive greater predictability and control over their social environment, thereby enhancing emotional regulation and adaptive coping. This aligns with Ryff’s (1989) eudaimonic model, particularly in the domains of autonomy and environmental mastery. In this sense, understanding sexual violence is not

merely informational but may serve as a mechanism for strengthening psychological agency.

Furthermore, in line with the adolescent resilience framework (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005), knowledge and competence function as developmental assets that support positive adaptation. Preventive awareness may foster critical skills such as boundary-setting, assertiveness, and social decision-making, which contribute to broader dimensions of well-being, including positive relations and personal growth. These findings reinforce the conceptualization of awareness as a cognitive-protective factor within adolescent development.

However, the magnitude of the observed association ($r = .951$; $R^2 = 0.904$) requires careful interpretation. Such a high correlation is uncommon in social science research and may indicate potential conceptual overlap between the constructs or inflation due to common method variance. Although Harman's single-factor test suggested that common method bias was not dominant, this method alone may not fully capture latent bias. Additionally, both variables were measured using self-report instruments collected at a single time point, which may contribute to shared variance. Therefore, the results should be interpreted as strong statistical associations within this sample rather than definitive evidence of a robust underlying causal relationship.

Another possible explanation is that adolescents with higher psychological well-being may be more engaged, attentive, and receptive to educational content, resulting in higher reported levels of understanding. This suggests the possibility of bidirectional relationships, which cannot be disentangled within a cross-sectional design. Future studies employing longitudinal or experimental approaches are necessary to clarify causal directionality and reduce potential bias.

Regarding gender, the findings indicated no significant moderating effect. This suggests that the relationship between understanding of sexual violence and psychological well-being operates similarly across male and female adolescents within this sample. While this finding contrasts with some previous studies that highlight gender differences in coping and trauma responses (Goodman-Williams & Ullman, 2020; Tolin & Foa, 2006), it may reflect the relatively homogeneous sample or limited statistical power. Future research with larger and more diverse populations is needed to further examine potential gender-based differences.

Despite these limitations, the study offers important theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it integrates cognitive appraisal theory, eudaimonic well-being, and resilience frameworks into a unified model that positions preventive awareness as a psychological asset. Practically, the findings underscore the importance of school-based educational interventions. Programs designed to enhance adolescents' understanding of sexual violence

may not only improve risk recognition and reporting but also contribute to broader psychological well-being. This highlights the role of educational institutions as key environments for promoting both safety and positive development.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the role of adolescents' understanding of sexual violence as a preventive cognitive resource associated with psychological well-being. The findings demonstrate a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between understanding and well-being among junior high school students.

However, these results should be interpreted with caution. The exceptionally high effect size and correlation coefficient suggest the possibility of shared method variance or conceptual overlap between constructs. In addition, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to draw causal conclusions. Therefore, the findings are best understood as indicating strong statistical prediction within the sample rather than definitive causal effects.

The study contributes to the literature by advancing a preventive and strengths-based perspective, positioning cognitive awareness as a potential psychological asset. By integrating cognitive appraisal theory, eudaimonic well-being theory, and adolescent resilience frameworks, this research expands the understanding of how knowledge and awareness may support positive psychological functioning. From a practical standpoint, the findings highlight the importance of incorporating comprehensive sexual violence education into school curricula. Such programs may not only enhance students' awareness and protective behaviors but also promote broader aspects of psychological well-being, including autonomy, environmental mastery, and personal growth.

Future research is recommended to employ longitudinal, experimental, and multi-method approaches to better understand causal mechanisms and reduce potential bias. Additionally, studies with larger and more diverse samples are needed to examine the generalizability of the findings and explore potential moderating factors such as gender, socio-cultural context, and educational environment. Overall, this study underscores the potential value of preventive awareness as a key component of adolescent development, shifting the focus from reactive intervention toward proactive resilience-building within educational settings.

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