

## **Victims of Verbal Sexual Harassment: Self Acceptance Influence Happiness**

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### **ABSTRACT**

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The happiness of verbal sexual harassment victims is depicted at a moderate to low level, which should not be underestimated as it affects their functionality. Internal factors like self-acceptance have a more substantial impact than external factors. This study aimed to examine the relationships between self-acceptance towards the happiness of verbal sexual harassment victims, along with the percentage of contribution by its predictor variables. This study uses a simple regression analysis method and involves 83 respondents in Surabaya who experienced verbal sexual harassment. Self-acceptance showed a significant positive relationship with happiness ( $t = 11.601$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) with contributing 62.4% towards happiness. This means the higher level of self-acceptance towards verbal sexual harassment experienced, the higher level of happiness.

**Keywords:** Happiness; Self-Acceptance; Sexual Violence

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The happiness of verbal sexual harassment victims is depicted to be at a moderate to low level. The results of a survey conducted by the author on March 8-10, 2023, distributed in Surabaya through a Google Form, indicate that 32% of people experience low levels of happiness, while 35% have moderate levels of happiness. Research by Pico-Alfonso et al. (2006) states that individuals who experience verbal sexual harassment, along with physical, psychological, and domestic violence, are more likely to suffer from severe depression and increased suicide attempts. Women who have experienced high levels of sexual harassment also tend to have lower levels of happiness compared to those who have experienced lower levels of sexual harassment (Mayungbo et al., 2021).

Sexual harassment refers to sexual behavior that is performed without consent or in a situation where the victim is unable to give consent or refuse (Schauer, 1987). According to the WHO (2021), there are several factors that contribute to the occurrence of sexual harassment, such as low education, family environment, personal disturbances, and culture. The CDC (2014) categorizes sexual harassment into four types: a) Penetration, which involves forced physical contact between objects or genitals of one person to another person; b) Non-physically forced penetration, where individuals use verbal pressure, intimidation, or improper authority to coerce others into agreeing and engaging in sexual acts;

c) Unwanted sexual contact, which includes intentionally touching someone's body or clothing without their consent; d) Non-contact sexual acts, which involve behaviors such as exposing sexual content or pornography, verbal sexual harassment, or taking unauthorized photos; e) Tactics, which refers to behaviors used to indirectly persuade someone to agree to and engage in sexual activities through intimidation, exploitation, offering alcohol, deception, or grooming of young children.

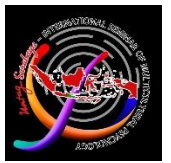
Sexual harassment is appearing more frequently in various forms, including catcalling (Nur, 2021). World Health Organization (2023) explains that 12% of healthcare workers have experienced verbal sexual harassment. Catcalling, insults, rape jokes, body shaming, and threats are all forms of verbal sexual harassment (Sbraga & O'Donohue, 2000). The impact experienced by victims includes severe physical and emotional conditions and low productivity levels (Jannah, 2021). In line with this, the psychological condition of sexual harassment victims becomes the second most crucial need (Catahu, 2022). Hsu and Tung (2010) explain factors that contribute to a person's happiness and well-being come from internal components, such as self-acceptance.

Seligman (2002) describes happiness as a high level of positive energy encompassing positive emotions and feelings. Kurtz and Lyubomirsky (2008) explain that happiness is a subjective state that involves self-evaluation to determine one's level of happiness. Furthermore, Myers & Diener (1996) state that happy individuals tend to like themselves, have self-control, are usually optimistic, and are mostly extroverted. Happiness is a subjective state of experiencing high levels of positive emotions, achieved not instantly but through feelings of pride, satisfaction, optimism, and positive expectations derived from enjoyable activities, enabling individuals to view themselves in a positive light.

Aspects that contribute to a person's happiness include a) positive emotions, which involve enjoying and experiencing positive emotions from the past, present, and future; b) engagement, which refers to wholeheartedly participating in positive activities; c) good relationships, indicating that individuals tend to be happier when they interact with positive people and have strong connections; d) accomplishment, where engaging in enjoyable activities and achieving goals creates a sense of satisfaction; e) meaningful life, which involves finding purpose and meaning in daily activities, leading to a more positive self-perception (Seligman, 2002).

Myers & Diener (1995) propose three factors that impact happiness: a) first, recent events, as only recent experiences have an emotional effect on a person's happiness for up to three months, allowing individuals to renew their experiences to make them more enjoyable; b) second, culture, where cultural norms sometimes emphasize negative emotions such as anger, anxiety, and guilt, leading individuals to perceive experiences negatively; c) third, values and goals, as individuals who set and work towards goals tend to have a positive self-value.

The impact of happiness includes a) short-term satisfaction, which is a feeling of contentment achieved through active involvement in various activities; b) long-term fulfillment, conceptualized as positive emotions resulting from the fulfillment of individual potential, striving for perfection, and self-actualization (Szentagotai & David, 2013). Diener and Tay (2017) also state that a happy person: a) improves health and longevity; b) enhances social relationships; c) contributes to workplace success by boosting productivity, creativity, and cooperative attitudes; d) and promotes prosocial behavior.



Someone who wants to achieve happiness can start by accepting themselves (Prameswari, 2020). Self-acceptance leads individuals toward positive emotions and attitudes, and by focusing on positive emotions, one can be directed toward happiness (King, 2001). Bernard (2014) suggests that fully accepting oneself leads to happiness and meaning in life. This condition is influenced by positive self-evaluation, appreciating all good behaviors, and evaluating oneself based on others' perspectives to improve oneself. Self-acceptance is strongly related to happiness, as it allows individuals to have self-awareness and positive regard for their own potential development. They can also experience pride and unconditional self-acceptance, meaning they acknowledge all strengths and weaknesses and take responsibility without blaming themselves when encountering negative situations.

Everyone desires happiness (King, 2001). Through happiness, individuals can lead a fulfilling life, and victims of verbal sexual harassment can start this journey by accepting themselves completely. The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between self-acceptance and the happiness of verbal sexual harassment victims. The formulated hypothesis is that there is a relationship between self-acceptance and happiness.

## METHOD

### Design Research

This study used a quantitative correlational design to identify variables that have relationships and create changes in other variables. The variables in this study were divided into two categories: 1) predictor variables, with self-acceptance as X; 2) dependent variable, with happiness as Y. The way participants participate in this research by filling out an online Google form which the author distributes. The data in Google Forms included informed consent, personal identity, when the incident happened, happiness scale, and self-acceptance scale. Participants were given the freedom to answer some statements based on their experience, so there is no correct or wrong answer.

### Participant

The population in this study is the population of Surabaya. The participant selection in this study used an incidental sampling technique with the sample criteria being individuals aged 18-35 who have experienced verbal sexual harassment and reside in Surabaya. This study involved 83 individuals, with an average age of 18-23 years, filled by 76 individuals. There were 6 individuals aged between 24-29 years, and 1 individual aged between 30-35 years. Of the respondents, 74 were female, and the remaining 9 were male.

### Instrument Scale

The instruments in this study are given in Bahasa, were assessed by 2 experts and underwent a try-out test with 30 initial respondents in Satgas PPKS Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya. Validity and reliability values were obtained for each scale variable. The response options from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" are in a 1-5 scoring range.

The happiness scale used in this study was adapted and developed based on previous research by Rina et al. (2022) to fit the current research needs. The item constructs were based on Seligman's theory and consisted of 56 items, including the statement "*Experiencing sexual violence makes me afraid of living my life.*" After going over the try-out, 9 items were eliminated, leaving 47 items suitable for distribution, with a reliability score of 0.949.

The self-acceptance scale applied in this research was modified and created based on Bernard's theory and comprised 42 items, including the statement "*I understand my strengths and weaknesses.*" Following the try-out test, 7 items were removed, resulting in a final set of 35 items that were rated appropriate for distribution. The scale demonstrated a high level of reliability with a score of 0.924.

### Data Analysis Technique

The data in this study were analyzed using quantitative methods with the assistance of SPSS version

26. The hypothesis testing in this research utilized simple regression analysis to examine the direction of the relationship between two variables and the magnitude of the change in variable X on variable Y. The scale tested in the try-out exhibited normal distribution, linearity, and absence of multicollinearity.

## RESULT

Table 1 presents the descriptive analysis results of the research data, including the minimum and maximum scores, mean values, and standard deviations of each research variable, as well as the total 83 respondents involved.

**Table 1.**

*Minimum & Maximum Score, Mean, Standard Deviation, and All The Variables*

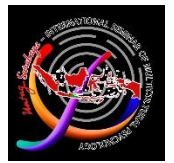
Variable	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
Happiness	83	232	175.2	28.9	83
Self-acceptance	78	166	126.6	17.6	83

Table 2 shows a t-value of 11.601 with a significance of 0.000 ( $p < 0.05$ ) obtained for the variable of self-acceptance. This result indicates a positive relationship between self-acceptance and happiness, where higher self-acceptance is associated with higher levels of happiness and vice versa. The known value of  $r$  is 0.790, which means that the two variables have a strong and significant correlation. Based on this, it can be concluded that the hypothesis is accepted.

**Table 2.**

*The Influence of Self-Acceptance on Happiness*

Model	Beta ( $\beta$ )	r	t	Sig
Constant			.796	.428
Self-Acceptance	.790	.790	11.601	.000



Based on Table 3, it is known that the F-value is 134.6 with a significance of 0.000 ( $p < 0.01$ ). This analysis result indicates that happiness is influenced by the variable of self-acceptance, and the simple regression model used in this study is valid. The R-square value stated in Table 5 is used to determine the effective contribution of the self-acceptance variable to happiness as the dependent variable, which is 0.624 (equivalent to 62.4% in percentage terms.)

**Table 3.**  
*Simple Regression Model*

Model	Sum of Squares	df	R Square	F	Sig
Regression	42942.22	1	.624	134.6	.000
Residual	25844.43	81			

Table 4 shows the number of verbal sexual harassment cases based on happiness categories ranging from low, to moderate, to high, and the time range of their occurrence. Within a time span of less than 1 year, there were 3 individuals with low happiness, 25 individuals at the moderate level, and 5 individuals with high happiness. Meanwhile, in the time range of 2-5 years prior, it is known that 5 individuals had low happiness, 24 individuals had moderate happiness, and 3 individuals had high happiness. In the case of incidents that occurred more than 5 years ago, there were 6 individuals with low happiness, 7 individuals at the moderate level, and 5 individuals with high happiness.

**Table 4.**  
*The Number Categories of Happiness and The Range of Events*

Categories of Happiness	Range of Event		
	<1 year	2-5 years	>5 years
Low	3	5	6
Moderate	25	24	7
High	5	3	5

## Discussion

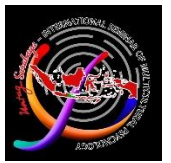
According to the analysis results, self-acceptance influences the increase in happiness levels. This means there is a significant positive relationship between self-acceptance and happiness. The higher level of self-acceptance towards verbal sexual harassment experienced, the higher level of happiness. When someone experiences verbal sexual harassment, they tend to feel low, sad, and down and may develop self-hatred. However, if the victim can fully accept themselves and acknowledge that they have experienced verbal sexual harassment, there is a high possibility that they will think rationally. They will realize that they are valuable regardless of the negative events they have experienced, and they do not need to hate themselves. This kind of rational understanding can trigger the emergence of positive emotions within the victim. As a result, they will feel more peaceful and free from fear in their lives. Self-acceptance contributes significantly, accounting for 62.4% of happiness, a substantial amount to achieve happiness. Therefore, victims need to fully accept themselves to be able to feel happy.

Bernard (2014) states that when someone can unconditionally accept themselves, they will have positive self-esteem and pride. This will lead to positive self-development behaviors. This finding is in line with Oltean et al.'s (2019) research, which shows that self-acceptance has a positive relationship with happiness levels, indicating that individuals are likely to sustain their positive emotions through self-acceptance and high flexibility. Szentagotai and David (2013) also revealed that self-acceptance brings individuals to rational happiness, where they express adaptive behavior and manage emotions in a functional way. Therefore, the first hypothesis in this study can be accepted.

Another finding in this study is related to the duration of the events. Most respondents (33 individuals) reported that the events they experienced occurred less than 1 year ago, indicating that the events are still recent and have not reached one year. In the second rank, 32 respondents reported that the incidents occurred between 2-5 years ago. Meanwhile, there were 18 respondents who reported that the events happened more than 5 years ago. From these findings, it can be concluded that both recent and long-term events do not guarantee that someone can achieve happiness. A survey conducted by Masho and Ahmed (2007) showed that 1,769 adult women in Virginia who experienced violence and sexual abuse before the age of 18 were at risk of various mental disorders, including PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder). Victims who experience verbal sexual harassment over a longer period and repeatedly tend to face more complex health issues (Campbell, 2006).

On the other hand, for respondents who have achieved high levels of happiness, they can be considered as individuals who have successfully recovered from verbal sexual harassment. Batten, Follette, and Aban (2001) state that survivors tend to avoid private experiences. This happens when the victim suppresses negative emotions, thoughts, and memories to achieve the same effect as before the incident of verbal sexual harassment occurred. The way survivors respond to their negative thoughts and emotions related to verbal sexual harassment as a coping strategy can be a factor that helps them cope in adulthood. Therefore, based on these findings, it is highly likely that the respondents in this study have successfully achieved high levels of happiness.

Verbal sexual harassment leaves psychological impacts that can be serious if individuals cannot overcome them. Negative self-perceptions and a collection of negative emotions contribute to low levels of happiness. Someone who only realizes their negative



emotions can be considered unhappy, so something that can help increase happiness is self-acceptance.

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