



RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Essence of Phenomenology in Forensic Communication Tradition: Revealing the Fragmentation of Sexual Harassment Victims' Experiences

Fajar Dwi Putra¹, Andi Alimuddin Unde², Hafied Cangara³, Andi Muhammad Sofyan⁴, Sadriyani Pertiwi Saleh⁵

^{1,2,3,4,5} Fakultas Ilmu Sosial dan Politik Program Studi Ilmu Komunikasi Universitas Hasanudin, Makassar, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

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This research examines the fragmentation of victims' experiences in cases of sexual harassment specifically focusing on the communication barriers that obstruct their ability to articulate and process trauma. The primary objective is to explore how these fragmented perceptions influence psychological and social recovery, while also highlighting the critical role of interpersonal communication in overcoming these challenges. A phenomenological approach was adopted, with in-depth interviews conducted with seven victims to identify recurring themes of fragmentation across various dimensions, including victim-victim relations, decision-making processes, trauma perception, recovery, and solidarity. The analysis reveals that victims' fragmented experiences often stem from challenges in expressing emotions, leading to emotional disconnection, internalized guilt, and difficulties in reconstructing coherent narratives of their trauma. The study underscores the significance of empathetic communication in helping victims reintegrate fragmented consciousness, facilitating the development of a more cohesive self-awareness. Moreover, the findings stress the necessity for effective communication strategies, which can support victims in their healing journey by promoting emotional coherence and strengthening social support systems. In conclusion, the research advocates for the adoption of more empathetic and comprehensive approaches in counseling and therapeutic practices to address the fragmented nature of sexual harassment experiences, offering a pathway to healing, empowerment, and the restoration of victims' psychological well-being.

***Corresponding Author:**

dwipaisme@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

For over a century of debate and discussion, phenomenology has yet to reach a clear consensus on its fundamental concepts (Araújo, 2023). This is attributed to the diversity of interpretations and descriptions regarding the nature of human experience, as well as the ontological fragmentation that continuously evolves (Zamperoni et al., 2024), particularly in sensitive issues such as sexual harassment. A key underlying factor in this debate is the lack of clarity in understanding phenomenology itself, further exacerbated by the increasing fragmentation of concepts (Schmid & Kriegleder, 2024). Some philosophers argue that phenomenology can function as a means to address doubts within human experience (Wirman et al., 2023). However, many phenomenological analysts fail to adequately explain fundamental elements such as consciousness, qualia, states of experience, or phenomenal awareness (Briedis & Navarro, 2024).

In highly sensitive contexts such as sexual harassment, phenomenology plays a vital role in uncovering direct experiences and acknowledging them from the first-person perspective. Unfortunately, the failure to grasp phenomenology often deepens the methodological distinction between subjective experience—encompassing emotions, feelings, and behaviors—and phenomenology as an alternative approach in qualitative research. The fragmentation of the direct

experience of sexual harassment victims often eludes the appropriate phenomenological concept, resulting in certain aspects being overlooked in this study.

Is there any guarantee that sexual harassment victims can fully recover from trauma? What can be done is to provide education and strategies aimed at building character based on the narratives that emerge in their conversations. At present, phenomenology is often regarded merely as a tool for revealing experience (Zhipu, 2023), whereas phenomenology is not merely a tool but also a strategy for understanding inner experience (Vara-Horna et al., 2023). Phenomenology emphasizes the significance of the victim's reflection in expressing their feelings and experiences, rather than simply recounting what happened (Langewitz, 2007).

This approach aims to correct misconceptions surrounding phenomenology. Many researchers tend to overlook the potential of phenomenology, which leads to perceptual biases that become a primary issue to address. In the case of sexual harassment, phenomenology must be more selective regarding the frequent fragmentation that occurs. The process of repeatedly disclosing experiences, if not managed appropriately, can complicate the distinction between direct experience and first-person acknowledgment. To analyze these differences, clear categories are essential for evaluating the quality of the victim's statements.

This phenomenon reflects the insufficient understanding of subjective experience, which plays a central role in the victim's communication development, potentially threatening the coherence and essence of phenomenology. Furthermore, research on fragmentation and the loss of subjective experience is considered inadequate (Chesworth, 2023). Some studies indicate contemporary challenges in explaining human consciousness. Early attempts to address fragmentation in sexual harassment victims are based on theoretical frameworks, where several theories employed are anti-reductionist and tend to impose explanations on still-debated concepts. However, theoretical autonomy should be extensive and open to criticism (Lemaigre et al., 2017). Based on this assumption, the relationship between phenomenology and subjective consciousness should be distinguished. However, in practice, both are often treated as equivalent entities, causing the fragmentation of the victim's experience to be obscured behind the philosophical descriptions of phenomenology.

In relation to the concept of phenomenology, the subjective experience of the victim is consistently characterized as direct, non-relational, and should be explicable through structural analysis and meaning. A historically-based approach to the fragmentation of the victim's trauma appears to serve as a fundamental motivation in this research. However, a more explicit methodological discussion is needed regarding the central question of the relationship between subjective experience and the meaning derived. A review of various previous studies reveals that communication, as an effective tool, has not been fully utilized to understand the victim's experience. Several studies indicate that the phenomenological explanations related to victims are still far from meaningful analysis and are largely general. This suggests a misunderstanding of the interaction between subjective experience and phenomenology. A fundamental transformation is required so that cases such as sexual harassment can be effectively addressed, preventing a paradigm shift that strengthens dominance when a single perspective becomes predominant.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a phenomenological approach to identify and address the fragmentation of the subjective experience of seven victims of sexual harassment. The resistance within the victims' subjective experiences is analyzed in depth, with data mapping conducted progressively through open coding to reveal initial data without guiding assumptions, axial coding to build more complex structures, and selective coding to form the narrative of the victims' experiences. The interview questions are designed openly to avoid leading questions. An interpretative paradigm is selected as a meticulous approach to explain the structure of subjective experience, while the victims' psychological predictions are analyzed using the Demystifying Epoche approach.

Through in-depth analysis, data deemed irrelevant is reduced to simplify the relationships between concepts. Theoretical explanations and predictions are formulated based on the causality between

data and theory, resulting in a more comprehensive analysis. Theories such as intentionality by Edmund Husserl, the concept of the body as the center of experience by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, interpersonal communication theory, and Judith Herman's trauma theory are utilized as the primary framework to investigate the essence of the victims' experiences. A dual approach is applied in the analysis to uncover the logical structure between the victims' understanding and their subjective experiences.

A. Research results

This study sampled seven victims of sexual harassment to understand the fragmentation of their experiences. The explanations provided are not intended as causal relationships but as an in-depth description of how the victims convey their personal experiences. The theories used in this study do not aim to claim absolute truth but rather to assist in analyzing the victims' subjectivity in the context of sexual harassment. More detailed explanations will also address phases that take into account the victims' internal states. To clarify the research objectives, we present the qualitative indicators in the table below:

Table 1: Qualitative research indicators

Qualitative Indicators	Specific Explanation
Victims' narrative of the sexual harassment experienced	Focuses on the emotional elements, how the victim describes their relationship with the perpetrator
Factors influencing the fragmentation of the victims' subjective experience	Whether there is a random pattern when the victims recount their experiences, whether metaphors are used in describing their experiences
The role of communication in the victims' recovery process	Differences in how victims narrate their experiences in different environments, such as with family and friends

Table 2: Respondent data

Name	Age	Case
X 1	25	Raped by biological father
X 2	25	Harassed by boss
X 3	24	Raped since the age of 8
X 4	21	Raped by stepfather
X 5	26	Harassed by a friend
X 6	26	Harassed by biological father
X 7	25	Harassed by biological father

1. Temporal fragmentation of victims

Reflecting on inner consciousness from a phenomenological perspective requires a first-person approach to the horizon of knowledge and emotional transformation. This condition represents an initial stage in identifying the extent of fragmentation within the victim's self. The research findings indicate that victims' experiences are fragmented into small, difficult-to-integrate parts, with predominant feelings of shame and guilt. Phenomenological research does not merely produce a list of interpretive themes but also generates reflective texts that integrate an in-depth exploration of meaningful human experiences (Chesworth, 2023). Generally, fragmentation arises because victims are unable to connect past experiences with relevant meanings in the present. Consequently, a more focused approach to the victims' experiences is necessary to avoid confusion in research practices (Mamoba et al., 2023). Maria Armezzani's (2021) research suggests that the meanings associated with victims' vulnerability are structured and interconnected with other dimensions of self (Guggisberg et al., 2021).

Repeated trauma experienced by victims triggers a paradigmatic shift from shame to fear. This shift indicates that victims lose temporal cohesion, a state of human consciousness that is unable to comprehend time in a linear manner (Kimmel et al., 2024). This condition separates the victims' experiences from time, making it difficult to form a continuous temporal understanding. Under normal conditions, humans are able to distinguish and remember events in an organized manner,

with the ability to understand time linearly (Dwanyen et al., 2024). However, the seven victims in this study demonstrated disturbances in short-term memory and difficulties in coping with consciousness. This phenomenon, known as temporal fragmentation, is often characteristic of individuals with severe depression, where inner consciousness cannot form a linear understanding of time.

All seven victims stated that their experiences were often misunderstood by others. Armezzani's (2024) findings show a development from a defensive stance to an active acceptance of vulnerability, which ultimately fosters self-understanding and influences communication practices (Armezzani & Zamengo, 2024). The temporal fragmentation experienced by the victims requires a strategic approach. The first step is to identify inner consciousness to determine if the victim is in a defensive position. The second step is to ensure that the emotional turmoil follows a framework of conscious activity. The fragmentation of victims' consciousness is often triggered by deep trauma that becomes an integral part of the complex abuse they have endured (Henriksson et al., 2024). A new model is needed to restore the essence of phenomenology as a cohesive and integrated inner consciousness.

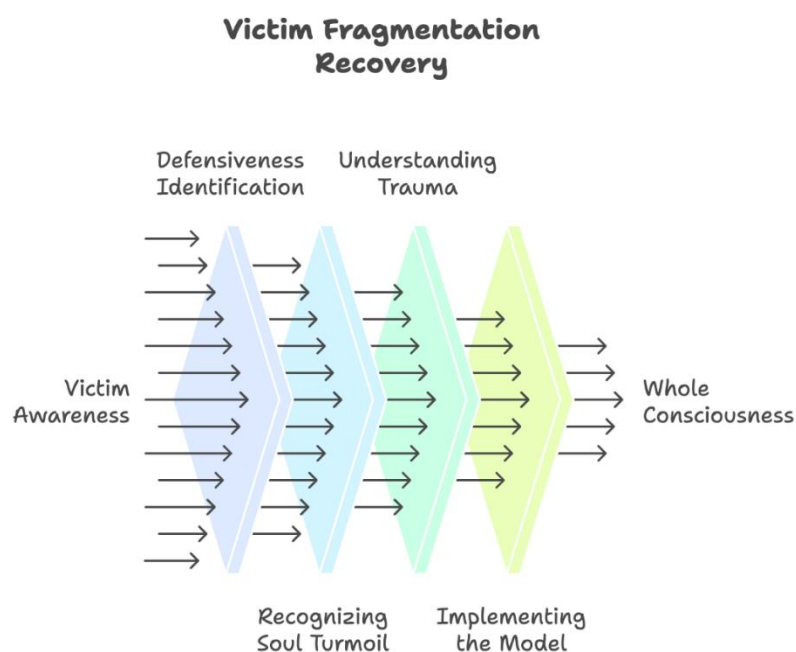


Figure 1: Victim fragmentation recovery model

The process of recovering from fragmentation, as outlined above, involves ensuring that no defensive responses occur and confirming that the victim maintains full awareness. From the perspective of Edmund Husserl's intentionality, researchers can comprehend an individual's consciousness by observing the presence of other consciousnesses beyond themselves, which facilitate the emergence of pure consciousness (Langdrige et al., 2023). Defensive responses arise when an individual perceives a threat, potentially leading to various limitations. Why must this response be avoided? Several reasons include: first, defensiveness can impede communication; second, it restricts self-development; third, it exacerbates conflicts; fourth, it undermines self-confidence; and fifth, it heightens stress and psychological burdens (Hofmann, 2024). These factors directly illustrate that a defensive state can impede the victim, constrain personal growth, and hinder adaptation.

One strategy to avoid defensive responses is by fostering positive relationships (Small et al., 2024). Every facet of the victim's experience can be explored through communication and psychological approaches to identify constructive opportunities (Makanadar, 2024). Based on the researcher's observations, all victims, in general, experienced temporal fragmentation. This manifested through mental activity reflected in conversation patterns that were uneven and disrupted, characterized by communication barriers, such as the interruption of supplementary information. This model was tested by the researcher on victim X3, and the results are presented in the table below:

Table 3: Results of the victim test X3

Name	Categorization
X 3	The victim initially felt defensive; however, our efforts progressed to the stage of providing a deeper understanding of the benefits of communication, removing the boundaries between us and the victim, and offering alternative pathways to the conclusion that self-disclosure requires moral support. Solidarity emerged after the victim realized that the primary awareness lay in the ability to confront the issue with personal strength.

Researchers found the transformation of consciousness X 3 after we conducted a model test, the changes are recorded in the table below.

Table 4: Transformation of statement X3

Initial Statement	Transformation
I was shocked, his face was already below my genitals, I was wearing a nightgown and crying	This is the risk, I must be able to resist this annoying feeling
I remember, I was already lying down, I didn't dare speak to my father	Because I am inherently a brave person, I eventually found the courage to speak.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty saw that the body is the center of human experience (Kulaeva & Khasueva, 2024), we analyzed the temporal changes in emotions X 3 to see fragmentation, resulting in the table below;

Table 5: Changes in victims' emotions

The body as a site of trauma	<i>I was really biting my house dress..., crying, just like I couldn't do anything</i>
The body as a tool of perception	<i>I realized that my position was horizontal,</i>
The body as a trace of trauma	<i>I tried not to go home, finally I tried to go home late.</i>

The body becomes the center of trauma experience; X3's body responds to the sexual assault she endured through reflexive actions, such as crying and biting her nightgown. This indicates that X3's body is the point of intersection between the internal world (emotions and trauma) and the external world (social environment) (O'Leary, 2024). As a tool of perception, X3's body not only becomes physically victimized but also serves as a means to record the details of the traumatic events she experienced. The body also acts as a trace of trauma, where X3's body indirectly creates defense mechanisms to avoid similar occurrences, demonstrating that bodily trauma has a significant impact on individual behavior (Sperandini et al., 2024).

All experiences, whether pleasure or trauma, are embedded in the body. The victim's body not only reads the internal and external worlds but also becomes the medium that records both (Pérez-Escobar, 2024). Merleau-Ponty explains that fragmentation occurs due to the disintegration between the body, consciousness, and the world (Gibbeson, 2024). In this context, the victim feels that her body no longer belongs to her, creating a psychological distance between self and body (Sulfaro et al., 2024). The sexual assault experienced by the victim causes a rupture in the way she views the world, transforming it into a place perceived as full of threats and danger (Sparby, 2024). The transformation experienced by X3 is an example of phenomenological bracketing, which meets the elements of epoche, such as focusing on subjective experience, eliminating irrelevant theoretical frameworks, avoiding generalizations, centering on the description of experience, and exploring the essence of the experience in depth (Andersson, 2024).

2. Phenomenography

Phenomenography is a qualitative approach aimed at exploring the variation in individual understandings, experiences, or perceptions of a phenomenon (Putra et al., 2023). This approach can be used to determine whether the phenomenon under investigation presents a cohesive picture or, conversely, becomes increasingly fragmented. The researcher strives to build an argument by formulating conceptual frameworks designed to integrate the missing parts of the phenomenology. In this process, the researcher adheres to the principle that "wholeness can indeed lead to fragmentation, and to achieve wholeness, a process of fragmentation is necessary."

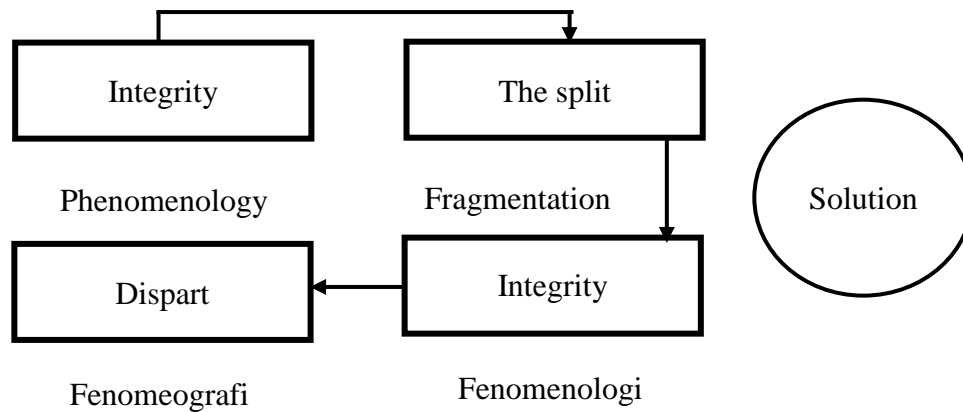


Figure 2: Concept of Integrity

The researcher’s approach in this study is to clarify the understanding of phenomenology, particularly in relation to fragmentation, which is often perceived as a factor that divides a condition. While it is true that fragmentation can lead to disintegration, the researcher has successfully identified an approach to restore and strengthen the concept of phenomenology. Phenomenography, in essence, serves as a method to reunite the separated elements by deconstructing them into several analytical components, as illustrated in the table below:

Table 6: Phenomenography

Name	Initial understanding	Advanced understanding
X 1	Not understanding sexual harassment	Recognizing as a teenager
X 2	Fear and dependency	Reporting after receiving support
X 3	Confusion and shame	Recognizing abuse as an adult
X 4	Considering harassment as something that cannot be avoided	Full awareness as an adult
X 5	Not understanding it as sexual harassment	Full awareness as an adult
X 6	Not understanding norms related to sexual harassment	Recognizing deeper emotional implications
X 7	Considering the perpetrator as an authority figure	Recognizing the importance of resistance as a teenager

The researcher’s experience in conducting interviews with seven victims revealed a positive index. The disclosures from the victims were fragmented through emotional movements such as fear, sadness, and other affections. This clarified that the victims experienced fragmentation because their emotions were halted and not properly channeled. This belief refers to the subjects who gradually expressed their emotions; victims X1 to X7 faced barriers in expression and difficulties in interpersonal communication, resulting in suboptimal communication functions. The overwhelming fear hindered them from understanding their own state of awareness. This condition illustrates the phenomenography of the victims' awareness in the form of direct experience, where the perception of sexual abuse is understood as the core of empathy for oneself (Benton et al., 2024). However, after interpersonal communication approaches were implemented, all seven victims experienced positive changes, no longer feeling afraid to share their experiences.

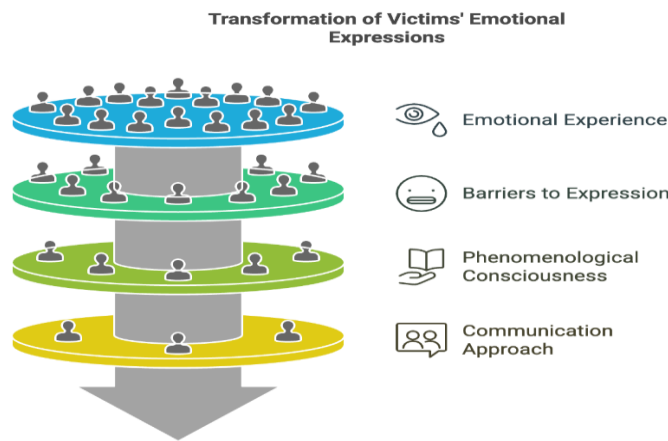


Figure 3: Transformation of 7 victims

3. The concept of victim enology

Enology is the process through which individuals develop thoughts about the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others (Qhogwana, 2022). In other words, enology refers to the victim’s ability to analyze their own inner consciousness in order to recognize the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others. Ideally, victims should be capable of performing enology. However, due to the impact of sexual abuse and the fragmentation they have experienced, the researcher found that the victims’ awareness of enology did not emerge. The seven interviewed victims admitted to not wanting to recall the incident. This condition caused the phenomenology to become blurred, even to the point of cessation. This phenomenon involves inner consciousness and subconscious traps, which Husserl refers to as intentionality (Haami et al., 2024).

Ashish Makanadar (2013) explains that psychiatric insights emerge from intersubjective experiences (Makanadar, 2024). This is related to the role of empathy and communication in psychiatric practice, particularly in Jaspers’ theory, which emphasizes that human existence cannot be separated from individual freedom (Langdrige et al., 2023). This theory also considers transcendence as an inseparable element of human existence (Malandrone et al., 2024).

This understanding further strengthens the researcher’s argument that fragmentation can undermine the concept of phenomenology. The researcher agrees that each time an individual has a phenomenal conscious experience, the victim’s higher-level model of consciousness will continue to form. This consciousness is driven by the victim’s analysis of their inner awareness, including trauma and past experiences. The diagram below illustrates how the researcher views existence as a foundational reference:

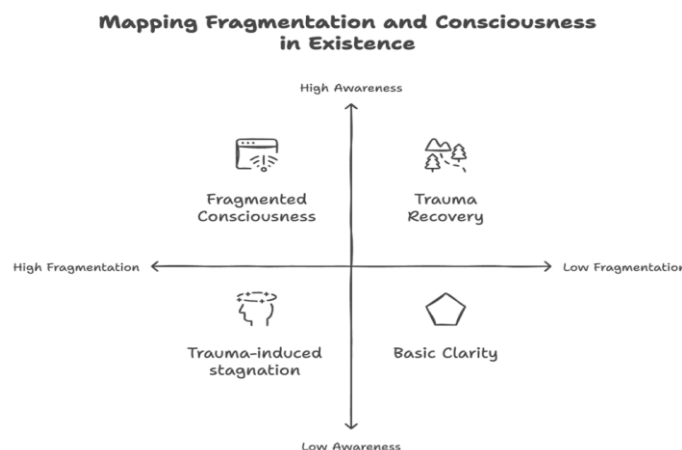


Figure 4: Mapping fragmentation and consciousness in existentialism

It is essential to understand the phenomenological basis of the victim, particularly in relation to the different forms of consciousness experienced. The researcher observes that the victims' experiences exhibit a significant level of resistance to disclosure, yet the potential for recovery from adversity remains attainable. Based on the interviews conducted, the researcher mapped the categorization of the seven victims to identify the various dynamics and responses that emerged. The results of this categorization are summarized in the table below to offer a clearer understanding of the findings.

Table 7: Categorization of victims

Name	Categorization
X 1	There is a relationship with the perpetrator; communication and silence, Feelings of relief after speaking, Seeking support
X 2	Fear of reporting, Guilt, Psychological dependence, Psychological threats, Domination and control, Physical violence, there are efforts to fight back, Victim solidarity
X 3	Distraction through activities, Self-protection efforts, Solidarity and victim advocacy
X 4	The victim's repeated experiences show a pattern of fragmentation of trauma experiences connected to her social environment, A harsh father and unsupportive mother hinder Tika's ability to share and process her traumatic experiences, Delays in understanding abuse as wrong are caused by a lack of effective sex education, victims develop strategies to avoid abuse and respond to threats in the future.
X 5	The victim's understanding that she experienced sexual abuse only emerged years later, after receiving information.
X 6	Childhood trauma, psychological impacts such as fear, suicide, and discomfort in social relationships.
X 7	Victims feel that their experiences are not fully understood and become divided due to trauma and guilt, Perpetrators use threats and manipulation to keep their actions secret and justify their behavior, Victims need support to reconstruct their experiences and move on with their lives.

4. Victim response

The responses provided by the victims support the questions posed by the researcher regarding the existence and nature of the objects of consciousness. "How has this experience affected the way you view yourself and your relationships with others?" The use of the first-person approach in the interviews helps construct the victim's experience to achieve a more normalized awareness. The victims' responses lead to an analysis of attitudes and ideologies related to sexual harassment. The appropriate communication propositions used in the interview ensure the fulfillment of comprehensive declarative statements, such as: "How would you describe the change in how you view yourself after experiencing this event?" The initial description of the victims' responses reveals a demonstrative attitude that emerged during the interview (Briedis & Navarro, 2024). The researcher notes that throughout the interview, a spontaneous escalation occurred, marked by feelings of resentment, anger, disappointment, and sadness. The perceptual objects they imagined were objects they wished to forget, yet the responses received by the researcher reflected emotional movements related to their high expectations. Subsequently, the researcher no longer observed demonstrative elements in their presentation.

In general, the responses provided by the victims can be considered positive, with non-verbal attitudes supporting verbal statements that could not be directly expressed. The researcher's ability to listen was also commendable. Husserl referred to these elements as the *thetic* character of action and the sense of action (Abboud et al., 2022). Overall, the phenomenological method can lead to a more coherent understanding of experience and awareness (Macleod, 1947). The researcher continued to explore how responses could be shaped and whether there was a connection to individual abilities and intelligence. Research by Oscar F. Gonçalves (2024) revealed challenges in measuring consciousness, particularly in victims of sexual harassment, which is expected to help identify different states of awareness (Gonçalves et al., 2024). This indicates that the quality of communication significantly affects responses and emphasizes the importance of

detailed recording of positive responses (Manning, 2024), allowing the propositional content of difficult-to-express states to be conveyed smoothly and without impediment.

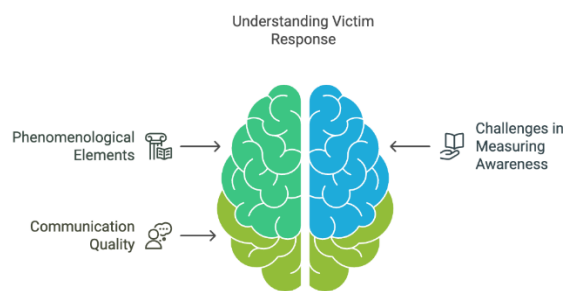


Figure 5: Understanding victim response

5. Types of victim fragmentation

Based on the results of observations of interview data with seven victims, researchers classified several fragmentations of victim experiences as follows:

Table 8: Victim fragmentation classification

X 1, X 2 and X 4	Experiencing emotional fragmentation; the expression of feelings is disconnected, cannot flow smoothly.
X 3, X 5, X 6 and X 7	Experiencing memory fragmentation; the memory is not complete

The researcher links Table 7 to the fragmentation of the victims' experiences, and the analysis reveals several findings as follows:

- a. Fragmentation in Relationships and Communication: X1 expresses a sense of relief after talking, yet silence also emerges as a primary response. X7 highlights the feeling that the victim’s experiences are not fully understood, creating a disconnection between what is felt and how the world responds.
- b. Fragmentation in Decision-Making and Guilt (X2, X5): X2 indicates fear of reporting, feelings of guilt, and psychological dependency on the perpetrator. X5 describes the victim's realization of the abuse, which surfaced years later.
- c. Fragmentation in Perception and Trauma Patterns (X4): The victim's trauma often recurs and is associated with social environment patterns (a strict father, an unsupportive mother). Ineffective sex education delayed the victim's understanding of the abusive behavior.
- d. Fragmentation in Recovery and Solidarity (X3, X7): X3 shows that the victim uses distractions or activities for self-protection while supporting other victims. X7 illustrates the need for support in reconstructing their experiences.
- e. Psychological and Social Fragmentation (X6): X6 notes childhood trauma that leads to psychological impacts, such as fear, suicidal thoughts, and discomfort in social relationships.

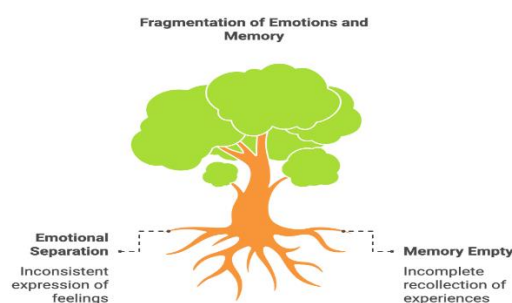


Figure 6: Emotional fragmentation flow

Changes in each fragment occur gradually, which necessitates the use of an interpersonal communication approach by the researcher to restore the existing phenomenological position. Discontent is reflected in the emotional shifts experienced by victims X1, X2, and X4, which form part of the phenomenological structure of experiences hidden by fragmentation. Thus, the elements of fragmentation in X1, X2, and X4 in Table 8 can be interpreted as actions detached from human consciousness. This intentional structure of experience places feelings of disconnection and emotionality as the final two aspects that require analysis as the fragmentation of stigma resulting from fragmentation (Droit-Volet et al., 2024)

CONCLUSION

The fragmentation experienced by sexual assault victims is often caused by barriers in articulating their experiences, stemming from the ineffectiveness in communication and message transformation processes. Therefore, to restore phenomenology within its proper framework, the researcher employs a phenomenographic approach that focuses on a deep understanding of semantics, logic, and language. This approach necessitates attention to how changes in the victim's experience can be articulated more clearly and coherently. In this context, interpersonal communication plays a crucial role in shaping a more expressive and comprehensive understanding of the victim's experience. The fragmentation observed is not merely a technical issue in communication but also signifies an imbalance in how victims perceive and express their traumatic experiences. From a phenomenographic perspective, errors in fragmentation can serve as a tool to evaluate and enhance the understanding of the victim's experience, while simultaneously strengthening their awareness of the importance of disclosure.

At a more advanced stage, the victim's phenomenology develops through direct interaction with interpersonal communication, wherein communicative engagement helps deepen the victim's thought processes and allows them to reflect on their experiences in a more structured and cohesive manner. The researcher found that through this process, victims can achieve a more integrated self-awareness, free from emotional fragmentation. The disclosure of their experiences becomes a means to rebuild a coherent sense of self, generated through critical evaluation of their experiences. Although feelings of resentment and negative emotions toward the perpetrator remain strong, the act of disclosure can serve as a catharsis, transforming these emotions into the courage to speak out and confront trauma. This experience not only liberates the victim from the shadows of their past but also fosters greater collective awareness among other victims. Based on these findings, the researcher recommends an empathetic and in-depth communication approach in supporting victims, as well as strengthening social support systems to expedite the recovery process and provide victims with the space to share their experiences openly and safely.

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Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest regarding the research, analysis, and publication of this study. All findings, conclusions, and interpretations presented in this work are independent and based on the objective analysis of the data.

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