Understanding the Importance of Sexual Consent among University Students

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Abstract. The knowledge about how young people understand sexual consent remains scant. This study aimed to understand how the university students perceived sexual consent and the importance of consent before engaging in sexual related activities with a partner. Using explanatory sequential mixed method approach, an in-depth interview was conducted to five participants following administration of survey questionnaire to obtain a general view on the issues around sexual consent. 102 active university students at the age between 18-25 years old participated in this study. The result of the questionnaire-survey was analysed with descriptive analysis and the in-depth interview data were transcribed and were analysed using the Interpretative Phenomenology Analysis (IPA). Integration of data was done to find pattern and relation between quantitative and qualitative data. Findings from this study suggest that young people, both young men and women, perceived sexual consent as important and, therefore, should be obtained before engaging in any sexual contact. While gesture and direct communication were the common techniques on communicating consent between genders, there were still difficulties in conveying the message of consent because of the subjective feeling and norms of the society.

Keywords: consent; perception; sexual activity; sexual contact; sexual consent

Based on the Indonesian Adolescent Reproductive Health Survey [Survei Kesehatan Reproduksi Remaja Indonesia] (Badan Pusat Statistik Indonesia, 2018), the awareness and understanding of youth about sexual health is low. Roughly 13% of young women in Indonesia did not know about their physical changes and around 47.9% of young women did not know about their fertile period. These data suggest that young people in Indonesia are still lacking of understanding about sexual and reproductive health and education. This implication may indicate the sexual risk behavior in the early young age.

Sexual and reproductive health education is essential to minimize the risk of risky sexual behaviors among youth that might lead unwanted pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, or other sexually transmitted infections (STI's) ("The effects of sex education in promoting sexual and reproductive health in Portuguese university students", 2011). Low awareness of sexual education, including how to communicate and have a discussion about SHR, highly leads to produce rape culture and perpetuate negative stereotypes both male and female (Lanford, 2016). Burt (1980) defined rape culture as a pervasive ideology that effectively supports or excuses sexual assault, which is caused

by traditional gender roles, adversarial sexual beliefs, and acceptance of interpersonal violence. Rape itself is indiscriminate both men and women. Social status, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and religious persuasion do not become considerations of an individual becoming a victim (BS et al., 2013).

It is further suggested that most rapes and other sexual assaults are often committed by someone who knows the victim well (BS et al., 2013). Current or ex-husbands and partners, recent acquaintances, colleagues, and people of trust can be the perpetrators (Povey et al., 2009). Based on statistical data, amongst the university students in the United States of America, 83% to 90% of sexual assaults were committed by a perpetrator who was known as a victim's prior acquaintance, romantic interest, dating partner, and friend (Abbey, 2002; Armstrong et al., 2006; Fisher et al., 2000). The assault can lead to the diminishing physical, mental, and sexual health among the victims (Jozkowski & Peterson, 2013; Mcfarlane et al., 2005). This will lead to other negative implications on university students such as overindulging in drinking and drug use, lowering academic achievements, and being prone to revictimization (Combs et al., 2014).

The previous discussion is derived from the perspective in the United States, and it is crucial to question how topic of sexual education is included in the Indonesian regulatory frameworks. Sexual consent has begun to be seen as a crucial topic. It is evident in the current drafting of the Law on the Elimination of Sexual Violence [*Rancangan Undang Undang (RUU) Penghapusan Kekerasan Seksual*]. Article 16 of this Law stated that:

"*Rape as referred to in Article 11 paragraph (2) letter e is sexual violence committed in the form of violence, threats of violence, or deception, or using the condition of someone who is unable to give consent to engage in sexual relations.*" Furthermore, if a person does sexual activity without consent, it refers to Article 108, paragraph 1 "*shall be liable to a minimum prison sentence of 3 (three) years and a maximum of 12 (twelve years) and criminal Additional Indemnification.*"

The article implies that providing consent is the right of the person. This view follows a principle enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Human Rights principle, the inherent dignity of human being (United Nations, 1948): "*whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world. . .*". The statement from the United Nations about human rights also discusses about equality. Equality in this topic is about men and women, as it is evident that there are gender differences in the subject of well-being (put reference).

The articulation of human rights and consent is vital due to the legal consequences. Indonesia will very soon be at that standpoint as the Draft Law on the Elimination of Sexual Violence [*RUU Penghapusan Kekerasan Seksual*] is now under the priority of Indonesian Parliament to proceed National Legislative Program. This indicates a major breakthrough for Indonesian people to tackle issues of sexual harassment and sexual assault. In 2020 alone, the Indonesian National Women's Commission [*Komisi Perempuan Nasional Indonesia*] reported that there were 4.489 individuals suffered from sexual assaults.

Sciaraffa and Randolph (2011) found that the knowledge and understanding of sexual consent among young people in Indonesia are still low due to lack of exposure to information, which often

caused by the fact that sexual education is still considered taboo by parents. In Indonesia, parents often filter sexual education limited to understanding about their birth sex (men or women) (Justicia, 2017). There appears a misperception among parents that if children is exposed to sexual education, they will be curious and eventually become sexually active (Chrisman & Couchenour, 2002).

This study aimed to explore university students' perception regarding sexual consent. More specifically, it explored students' perception regarding the importance and nature of sexual consent as well as challenges in communicating about sexual consent. The results of this study were expected to enlighten the awareness of the importance in giving consent before engaging in sexual relationships or contact between male and female, which in turn may prevent the incident of sexual harassment or even sexual assault and other collateral damage experienced by the individuals.

Method

This research adopted an explanatory sequential mixed methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The design allowed the researchers to investigate how university students evaluated their perceptions about sexual consent and its importance of using it as a base to prevent sexual harassment or assault. Quantitative rating tasks and qualitative interviews were applied as data collection techniques.

There were two sub-studies in this research. The first stage of data collection is the quantitative component. This component adopted a survey questionnaire to reveal participants' argument ratings with a combination of question types: binary (yes or no) question, multiple-choice response, and short answer text. The second stage of data collection is the qualitative component, through in-depth interviews. An integration technique was undertaken in order to find the links between quantitative and qualitative data (Fetters et al., 2013).

This research was approved by the Ethics Committee at the Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Gadjah Mada, approval number 5265/UN1/FPSi.1.3/SD/PT.01.04/2020. All research participants provided consents to participate through recorded statement after following a verbal explanation about the study with regards to voluntary and confidentiality of the participants due to the sensitive topic that was being discussed.

Sub-study 1 – quantitative component

Participants

A total of 102 participants including 72 young women (70.6%) and 30 young men (29.4%) were recruited using Google Forms through social media platforms and stratified random sampling following these criteria: (1) Active university student; (2) not married; and (3) between 18-25 years of age. This age group was selected because according to Indonesian Central Bureau of Statistics [*Badan Pusat Statistik Indonesia*] in 2018, it stated that university students were categorized as "youth", with the age range of 16-30 years. Furthermore, it is indicated that youth tend to be more permissive towards premarital sexual behaviours that can be caused by several factors like showing off and satisfying sexual urges (Eze, 2014).

Data collection

The questionnaires used in this study were adapted from Jozkowski and Peterson (2013), and T. P. Humphreys (2000). The research instruments used was the first that has been partially adapted to Indonesian research study to allow adjustment to Indonesian context. There were 19 questions in the questionnaires that attempted to understand the concept and general understanding of sexual consent, communication of consent and non-consent between partners, interpret consent and non-consent between partners, and to indicate consent to specific sexual behaviours of the university students. These questionnaires were administered online via Google Forms and distributed throughsocial media platforms.

Data Analysis

The data obtained from the sub-study 1 were analysed with quantitative descriptive analysis by measuring the answers from the participants with cross-tabulations in SPSS which was employed to examine the disparate general overview of sexual consent. The goal of using quantitative descriptive analysis was to describe a phenomenon and its characteristics, which was more concerned with "what" rather than "why" or "how" something happened (Nassaji, 2015), and to know the general perception of university students regarding sexual consent.

Sub-study 2 – qualitative component

Participants

The qualitative study proceeded following the quantitative component by randomly selecting the participants who were willing to do an in-depth interview. A total of five (3 women and 2 men) out of 54 participants who volunteered were chosen to do the in-depth interview. For the confidentiality purpose, the participants' identity is deidentified by providing a unique number based on the interview sequence. These participants also had an experience of unilateral consent. Description of each participant is provided below:

1. **DASP (P1).** DASP was the first participant who was interviewed. She was a 22-year-old female student that went to the Faculty of Forestry. She stated that she had experienced sexual contact with her friend and also her boyfriend. According to her, sexual contact behavior that required a clear and explicit consent was kissing on the lips, touching partner's breast/chest, touching partner's genitals, having non-penetrative sex, and doing penetrative sex. She stated while there were differences in perception of sexual consent between female and male, in general she thought that people did not think about obtaining sexual consent before sexual contact occurred. Although she declared that sexual consent was necessary for all sexual activities, she indicated that one general request of consent was sufficient to represent all sexual activities.

2. **RS (P2).** RS was the second participant who was interviewed. A 20 years old female that attended the Faculty of Communication explained that she had experienced sexual contact with her

boyfriend. She stated that kissing on the lips, touching partner's breast/chest, touching partner's genitals, having non-penetrative sex, and doing penetrative sex were the sexual contact behaviour that required a clear and explicit consent. According to her, there were differences in perception of sexual consent between females and males. Furthermore, she indicated that people did think about obtaining sexual consent before sexual contact occurs. While she believed that sexual consent was necessary for all sexual activities, she also suggested that one general request of consent was sufficient to represent all sexual activities.

3. **AN (P3).** AN was the third participant who was interviewed. A 22-year-old female student that went to the Department of French Literature expressed that she had experienced sexual contact with her boyfriend. As stated by her, sexual contact behavior that needed a clear and explicit consent were kissing on the lips, touching partner's breast/chest, touching partner's genitals, having non-penetrative sex, and doing penetrative sex. AN indicated that there were differences in perception of sexual consent between female and male. In general, she argued that people did think about obtaining sexual consent before sexual contact occurred. Although she claimed that sexual consent was necessary for all sexual activities, she stated that one general request of consent was not sufficient to represent all sexual activities.

4. **IF (P4).** IF was the fourth participant who was interviewed. A 21 years old male that enrolled in the Faculty of Communication told that he had experienced sexual contact with his friend and girlfriend. According to him, sexual contact behaviour requiring a clear and explicit consent were non-penetrative sex and penetrative sex. IF explained that there were differences in perception of sexual consent between female and male and he stated that people did not think about obtaining sexual consent before sexual contact occurred. Although he expressed that sexual consent was necessary for all sexual activities, IF suggested that one general request of consent was not sufficient to represent all sexual activities.

5. **A (P5).** A was the fifth participant who was interviewed. A 23 years old male that went to the Faculty of Economics stated that he had experienced sexual contact with his girlfriend. As stated by him, holding hands, hugging, kissing on the forehead/cheek, kissing on the lips, touching partner's breast/chest, touching partner's genitals, having non-penetrative sex, and doing penetrative sex were the sexual contact behaviour requiring a clear and explicit consent. According to him, there were differences in perception of sexual consent between female and male. Furthermore, he stated that people did think about obtaining sexual consent before sexual contact occurs. While he believed that sexual consent was necessary for all sexual activities, he suggested that one general request of consent was sufficient to represent all sexual activities.

Data collection

In-depth interviews were conducted with the five participants. Several questions were partially adapted from Sexual Experience Scale (Koss et al., 1987) to understand past victimization and perpetration because this had been influenced with sexual consent behaviour (Shotland & Hunter,

1995). The questions were also given to participants to be able to describe more about their perception of sexual consent, and also to clarify while gathering detailed information from the questions that were already asked in the questionnaire stage. The in-depth interview was conducted using an online Google Meet interview, with the schedule of the interview taking place based on the availability of the participants. The duration of interviews was approximately 30 minutes per participant.

Data analysis

The data obtained from the qualitative component were analysed, identified, and searched for the pattern by using Interpretative Phenomenology Analysis (IPA) that aimed to explore in detail on how the participants were making sense of their personal and social world (Smith, 2015). It attempted to explore personal experience of the participants and also their perception of an object or event, and to deliver an objective statement of the object or event itself (Smith, 2015).

The first stage of the analysis with IPA according to Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) involved reading and re-reading the transcribed data which produced the initial coding. The second stage was from the initial coding; it started to develop the emergent themes from the result of exploratory comments and it searched for the connection across the emerging themes. The last one produced the super-ordinate theme for the data interpretation. Furthermore, the results from sub-study 2 were then consulted to the participants (i.e., member checking) to receive feedback on the credibility of the result (Birt et al., 2016).

Result

Quantitative findings revealed that among 89 participants who already had an experience of sexual contact, 83.1% of whom stated that men and women had different perceptions on sexual consent. The different perceptions according to the in-depth interview data study resulted in their different subjective understanding about sexual consent due to different past experiences of their sexual activity. It was likely to lead to their different interpretation on their limit and levels of sexual consent. The participants in the in-depth interview study stated that different understanding on sexual consent led to a distinction interpretation on limits and levels of sexual consent.

Among 102 participants, majority answered that they had experienced sexual contact with their dating partners (boyfriend or girlfriend) (Table 1). One of the factors encouraging people to do sexual contact was the quality of the relationship between the partner/person. The relationship length period affected the communication of consent. The longer participants knew the person, the easier it was to communicate the consent. The finding was backed-up with the in-depth interview study data which indicated the importance of the quality from the relationship between partner/person.

Table 1
Participant Responses on With Whom They Had Sexual Contact

With Whom	Female (n=72)		Male (n=30)		Total
	n	%	n	%	N
With friend	17	23.6	9	30.0	26
With boyfriend/girlfriend	55	76.4	29	96.7	84
With new people	5	6.9	2	6.7	7
Never had sexual contact	10	13.9	1	3.3	11
Choose not to provide a description	4	5.6	0	0.0	4
Total	72	100.0	30	100.0	102

Four superordinate themes emerged from the analysis of interviews: (a) the importance of limits and levels of sexual consent, (b) communicating consent, (c) impact of unilateral consent, (d) challenges in communicating consent.

The importance of limit and levels of sexual consent

According to the participants, sexual consent had its limitations and levels of importance. It means that a person's perception about sexual consent was different from another person because of their subjective experience. Based on their statement, the participants acknowledged that sexual consent was very important in a relationship.

"In my opinion, it is very important. The problem is that you can… it would be bad if, for example, one of the parties didn't agree (he/she) can report it (as) an act of sexual harassment." (P4)

When asked about the term *"sexual consent"*, all five participants had their different interpretation and perception indicating that the limit and levels of sexual consent was different between the others.

"Uhm… Sexual consent, I think it's like…uhm… if people want to have sex, they have to get permission first. And I just understood that, even holding hands has consent. That's what I understand." (P2)

"And yes, for example, like holding hands … I think holding hands or just hugging or just kissing the cheeks, kissing the forehead are all included in my opinion. And if it's just at the level (I mentioned previously) … at that level there's no need … asking for permission is not needed. It's not needed because we have already made commitments, but if the rest is more than that ... it is necessary (to ask for consent)." (P1)

Different levels of sexual contact behaviour had an essential role in order to give sexual consent. This led to the importance of the length of relationship and deeper understanding of the person because according to the participants, the more people knew each other, the closer they were with each other. Consequently, the levels of sexual consent became different.

"The length of time we get to know each other with the person we love might also be important because we can actually tell the little things… that… only the two of us know that. So, I already understand, I know the gestures." (P3)

"The thing is, I myself tend to be ... what is it ... actually less comfortable. If people who are ... if I don't really know well, I'm not comfortable being around them. That is very personal, I mean, especially when I am in the same room and I don't really know well." (P5)

This concludes the importance of the limit of sexual consent. Two of the participants stated the importance of privacy.

"Because no matter how close people are, we still have our own privacy limits." (P1)

"Yes ... why it is important, uhm... because, in my opinion, it is private property no matter what. I mean… you can't carelessly hold others' property. That's why we still need err ... there needs to be communication." (P5)

Communicating consent

Participants were asked about how they communicate the consent to their partner. Of all three women participants, they answered that they communicated consent through gestures.

"Oh ... just with gestures. In my opinion, humans have two languages, spoken language and body language. For example, if I give permission, I won't refuse or fight back when he got close, right? Meanwhile, if for example I really don't want it, I will definitely avoid it, it's just that simple." (P1)

"If I'm the one who wants it, I'll ask, although not so openly. I'll say something like "Do you want it or not?". If he doesn't want to do it, and he's like, "No, Sorry. I'm not feeling like doing it". We've never been like (forcing and saying)"come on". We don't do that. We just ask "Do you want it?". just like that, although more uhm… not straightforward." (P2)

"Hm, maybe with gestures or with signs. It's like, for example, we already understand expressions, something like "Oh, you want this? What do you want it to be?" (P3)

On the other hand, two men participants reported that they communicated consent through verbal communication. They suggested that direct communication was important when communicating consent.

"For me, I usually say that directly." (P4)

"Usually, uhm, usually I ask. There is usually tension, right? Now even then, if the tension is already visible, it means the situation are already intense. I sometimes like to ask permission verbally, such as 'Is it okay if I'm doing this?' I tend to be verbal anyway." (P5)

The differences of answers indicate preferences of men and women in communicating consent.

Impact of unilateral consent

All participants had an experience of unilateral consent, of which they had different experiences of locations and perpetrators. Two women participants stated that they knew the perpetrator, whereas one men participant stated that the perpetrator was an acquaintance of him. The women participants explained that the perpetrator used manipulation and abusive power in order to get consent from the participants.

"The senior is my brother's friend. The senior is from the same faculty as my brother. Then the senior introduced (himself) to me. I am actually forbidden by my parents to uhm... I'm not allowed to go to certain places (like nightclubs). He responded jokingly, but he seemed to threaten (me) by saying, 'I'll tell your brother, I'll tell your brother.' Then, like it or not, I tried to be friendly and kind with him there." (P1)

"But, from my ex-boyfriend himself, he was like ... like convincing ... like convincing (me) by saying, 'it's okay, it's okay,' but I said 'no, I don't want to (do it)', 'I don't want (it) now.' I always say that." (P3)

A man participant experienced this event when he met the female perpetrator on an online dating application. Even if he did not want to or meant that there was going to be any sexual contact, he could not refuse the sexual contact behaviour from that female perpetrator.

"Well, the two of us are alone in her room. Then, she started to behave as if she was afraid. She then hugged (me) and kept on hugging me. Well, then she's already ...uhm... her hands started to hold my genitals. Well, she grabbed it, while trying to kiss me. She made the first move... hm... there I was still like 'okay'." (P4)

From their experience, they felt shocked, ashamed, and scared at the same time. The man participant stated that he was scared of being contracted with Sexual Transmitted Infections. And still imprint on their present lives.

"But the next day, when I realized and I remembered the details of the incident, I was really, uhm ... ashamed of myself, uncomfortable. After that incident, I was reluctant to see her." (P1)

"The feeling is, like always ... there must be a phase of these thoughts until now. Then (thinking), 'Why didn't I dare to say (no) in advance? Why didn't I dare to refuse? or why did I not just leave?' Like there was a feeling of regret." (P3)

"Well, she forced me to have sex. Uhm, I didn't dare (to do it) because I was like... I just met and was scared uhm... and there was no contraception there... no condoms. I was afraid... because I didn't really know much about her and was afraid that she had a sexual disease... venereal disease or whatever, I didn't know. Well, there she was coercing it but I still didn't want to. So, I said 'no, if I didn't use a condom, I didn't want to do it,'. But she still forced it." (P4)

Because of those experiences, participants managed a strategy to prevent those incidents happening again. They argued that they should have been firmer in their actions and empowered themselves. Furthermore, the act of avoiding by uninstalling the online dating application was one of the practical strategies to prevent the incidents happening again.

"So, the real lesson is, 'Oh okay, if I want to start a relationship again, I have to be brave blah blah blah.' You have to be different; you have to dare to change. It cannot be like the old days, that's how it is." (P3)

"Instantly, I uninstalled the apps. It's scary if it happened again. Well, it's like... it's not difficult. If I want a serious relationship, I need to look for it properly, or being more selective. (It's important that I) Don't immediately want to be invited to have sex at someone's place." (P4)

Challenges in communicating consent

All participants had a feeling of difficulties on how to communicate consent. One of the factors was that they felt ashamed of communicating it.

"Yes, I don't know how to say it and also ... I was just ashamed. As if (I had been) frightened, even ill-feeling. Because I'm the type of a person who easily becomes resentful and uncomfortable." (P1)

"How could I have said it if I didn't want to (do it) because it was usually ended up by a question uhm... like 'why you don't want it? 'Then, it would turn out to be 'Okay, no problem.' So, I felt hesitant too, I was actually afraid of finally accepting (the offer to engage in sexual activity). What I'm trying to say is that I didn't know how to express my consent properly" (P3)

Another difficulty that participants felt was that they were afraid of rejection or negative reaction from the partner.

"The fear, I believe, was because I was worried of being rejected. Maybe, it was because of my partner factor. My partner didn't seem that he had enough time. Then, I learned the gestures... when the gesture was like 'I'm tired', I felt like immediately being rejected first with a gesture indicating he was tired, (and) reluctant. Alright, okay, I didn't ask anymore, I immediately felt rejected first." (P2)

"If there was rejection, it would continue to be uncomfortable on both sides." (P4)

This led to the feeling of hesitation that showed over thinking, indicating that cultural norms in society and taboo played a big role in why communicating consent was difficult.

"Later he might think it's weird ... 'Oh, this girl is really aggressive or naughty'... The problem is, we're still kind of like this uhm... it's still a bit taboo if it's a girl .... If it's a girl who started the initiative." (P1)

Discussion

This study aimed to understand how university students perceived sexual consent from the perspective from both men and women, of which inform policy and action to educate and prevent the act of sexual harassment and rape. The result shows that the findings were similar to the previous studies conducted in other countries, mainly related to the finding of the significant differences on how men and women perceived sexual consent and how to communicate consent. According to Hickman and Muehlenhard (1999) and Hall (1998), university students tend to use non-verbal cues to express sexual consent by (such as not saying no; not refusing partner's advances; making eye contact). Whereas according to Jozkowski (2011), overall university students tend to use verbal cues to show consent (such as saying yes when being asked to have sex; asking partner for having sex; asking to wear condom).

In communication, there is a difference between men and women. Merchant (2012) stated that, "*the biggest difference between men and women and their style of communication boils down to the fact that men and women view the purpose of conversations differently*". Jozkowski (2011) stated that there were gender differences related to sexual consent communication. For women, for example, they tend to inform sexual consent verbally if engaging in sexual activity. While for men, they tend to inform consent with non-verbal cues if engaging in sexual activity. From the result of the in-depth interview, the finding showed that most female participants communicated consent with gesture or non-verbal cues, while male participants stated that they communicated directly or verbally.

Women are overall more expressive, tentative, and polite in conversation, men tend to be more assertive and power-hungry (Basow & Rubenfeld, 2003). It is correlated because it shows that there was a fairly significant gap of percentages in both genders on how they perceived and communicated consent from the questionnaire. Of 89 participants who already had an experience of sexual contact, 83.1% of the participants stated that men and women had different perceptions on sexual consent. A total of 83.6% from 61 female participants and 82.1% from 28 male participants answered that they had a different perception. The different perceptions according to the in-depth interview data occurred because of their different subjective understanding about sexual consent due to different past experiences of their sexual activity. This might lead to their different interpretation on their limit and levels of sexual consent.

Furthermore, of 102 participants 84 of them had experience of sexual contact with their dating partners. 76.4% of 72 women participants stated that they had sexual contact with their boyfriend, while 96.7% of 30 men participants stated they had sexual contact with their girlfriend. These findings correlated from the in-depth interview data. One of the factors why people did sexual contact activity was due to the quality of the relationship between the partner/person. The amount of time they knew the person affected consent communication. The more one knows the person, the easier it is to communicate the consent. On the contrary, participants felt that privacy played an important role when giving consent in a sexual activity because the feeling of subjective privacy correlated to how well one knew the person. The other person whom one might have known well would probably tolerate

better regarding sexual activity experience. This suggests that people who did not know each other well might feel uneasy and uncomfortable when giving consent in a sexual activity, because there is no trust in the interaction. Trust not just only can contribute to the experience of safety, intimacy, satisfaction, and also pleasure that will impact sexual well-being and relationship stability (Harris et al., 2016), but also become the standard of relationship quality and diverse relationship structures (Conley et al., 2017).

Findings from this research add new knowledge from what previously known about how people perceive from sexual activity can be impacted by the form of sexual consent and the explicitness of the expression (T. Humphreys, 2007). This suggests that two types of communicating consent from in-depth interview data, gesture and verbal language might lead to a misperception. Communicating through gestures are prone to cognitive bias due to the lack of explicit and clear communication of consent, whereas verbal communication indicates a much explicit and clearer form of communicating the consent. Misperception can also come from cognitive bias both from the receiver and sender. Cognitive bias is subjective or predisposed opinions that can emanate from specific heuristics (Bazerman, 1990; Busenitz & Lau, 1996). It may result in less rational and less comprehensive decision making (Barnes, 1984) and these biases will arise when making complex and uncertain decisions (Schwenk, 1984). Both the receiver and sender, therefore, have different understanding about certain topics, due to many factors like external and internal.

When it comes to the topic of sexual consent, two people will have different understanding about what sexual consent is and they might have a different perception about sexual consent. This leads to another finding that participants from in-depth interviews felt the impact of unilateral consent such as feeling shocked, ashamed, and scared. The experience from the participants correlated to the studies that 19% of girls with the range of age between 15-49 years old had experienced physical and/or sexual violence within their intimate partner in the last 12 months, yet there are 49 countries that do not have any laws to protect women from those experiences (WHO, 2017). Furthermore, both male and female participants indicated the feeling of hesitations, which led them to overthink their action on communicating consent because of cultural norms in the society. The participants felt that they hesitated to communicate consent due to the habit in a certain cultural norm. Especially for women, one of the participants stated that it was considered as taboo for a woman in Indonesia to ask consent in order to have a sexual contact and prone to be prejudiced if a woman to do so. As a consequence, it formed the difficulties on communicating consent, which eventually led to the feeling of ashamed and fear of rejection and negative reaction from the partner.

These findings correlated to previous studies that cultural value is different from one nation to another. In Japan, the males tend to be more reticent about expressing emotions (Fujihara et al., 1999; Ramirez et al., 2001), while in Spain, families are characterized by male domination, which means that man hold a significant position in the families and communities (Sorenson & Telles, 1991), which contextualises as unequal gender relations (Walby, 1989). This differences on gender relations and identities in a patriarchy culture will contextualize a communication in a feminist thinking; this will be able to distinguish consent and non-consent in the current social context without a radical change in

the structure of social and cultural gendered relations (Cowling & Reynolds, 2004).

Conclusion

Results of this study showed university students perceived sexual consent as an important aspect. There were significant differences on limits and levels of sexual consent between gender men and women that resulted in the experience of sexual contact activity and subjective understanding about sexual consent. Gesture and direct communication were the techniques on communicating consent between genders, in which women participants communicated with gestures, while men participants preferred direct communication or verbal communication. There remained some difficulties in communicating consent because of the subjective feeling and cultural norm of the society which might lead to the negative implications of unilateral consent from both genders in a short and long term, that imprint on their daily lives.

Recommendations

Further studies are required in order to obtain broader studies in various contexts of sexual preferences and the outcome of sexual harassment by increasing the number of participants and varying the method. Statistically, a further and thorough data collection in sub-study 1 is required in order to have significant data.

Declarations

Authors' contribution

The first author developed the study concept and wrote the entire manuscript, while the second author analysed the data and reviewed the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The first author developed the study concept and wrote the entire manuscript. The second author analysed the data and reviewed the manuscript.

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