

## **Creating an Environment Free from Sexual Violence Against Women and Children Within the Cultural Values of Mitawe in West Sulawesi**

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### **KEYWORDS**

Sexual Violence, Women and Children, Mitawe Culture, West Sulawesi.

### **ABSTRACT**

This research aims to create an environment free from sexual violence against women and children in West Sulawesi Province through the application of Mitawe cultural values. The Mitawe culture, which emphasizes politeness, respect, and dignity, is seen as an important tool in preventing sexual violence within the Mandar community. The research method used is empirical law, involving observation, in-depth interviews with traditional leaders and community leaders, as well as document analysis from the Office of Women's Empowerment, Child Protection, Population Control, and Family Planning (DP3AP2KB) of West Sulawesi Province. The research findings show that Mitawe values can be effectively integrated into sexual violence prevention programs through various interventions carried out in local communities. The implementation of these values has successfully raised public awareness about the importance of respecting the rights of women and children, as well as reducing the incidence of sexual violence in several districts. Moreover, collaboration with DP3AP2KB has enabled the implementation of more structured and sustainable prevention strategies, including training for victim advocates and public awareness campaigns. This research also found that strengthening local cultural values, such as Mitawe, can be an effective approach in creating a safer society free from sexual violence. These findings provide a foundation for developing more inclusive and culturally sensitive policies in the effort to protect women and children in West Sulawesi.

## **1. Introduction**

Sexual violence is a serious issue that affects various layers of society worldwide, including in Indonesia. This phenomenon not only involves physical aspects but also impacts the psychological condition of the victims, particularly women and children, who are often the primary targets (Frank et al., 2024). As an act that violates human rights, sexual violence requires serious and comprehensive handling, both in terms of prevention and action. In the Indonesian context, sexual violence has long been a concern for various parties, including the government, non-governmental organizations, and local communities (Altman, 2022)(Mardiyanti et al., 2023). Data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in 2023 shows that sexual violence remains a significant threat, especially in areas with lower education and economic levels. In West Sulawesi Province, for instance, sexual violence continues to be an urgent problem. According to reports from the Office of Women's Empowerment, Child Protection, Population Control, and Family Planning (DP3AP2KB) of West Sulawesi Province, in 2023, there were 82 recorded cases of sexual violence across various districts, with Mamuju being the district with the highest number (Pemerintah Indonesia, 2017) (Cejie, 2022).

One of the biggest challenges in addressing sexual violence in Indonesia is how to create an approach that is not only effective in legal terms but also culturally relevant. Indonesia, as a country rich in cultural diversity, has various local values that can be integrated into efforts to prevent sexual violence (Wirawan & Permatasari, 2022). One cultural value identified as having great potential in this regard is the values contained in the Mitawe Culture in West Sulawesi. The Mitawe Culture is a deeply rooted tradition in the Mandar community of West Sulawesi (Andi Dewi Pratiwi & Akhdiari Harpa Dj, 2022). Mitawe, which in the Mandar language means to ask for permission, greetings, and respect, symbolizes high politeness and mutual respect between individuals within the community. This value reflects the moral integrity highly regarded by the Mandar people, where politeness, respect, and maintaining dignity are essential aspects of daily life. In this culture, values such as mutual respect, maintaining social ties, and upholding dignity (Siri) are the main pillars influencing social interactions. The application of Mitawe Culture values in the context of preventing sexual violence offers a unique and contextual approach. In the Mandar community, integrating Mitawe values into daily life serves not only as an ethical guide but also as a strong social control mechanism. For example, the value of Siri, which is part of the Mitawe Culture, functions as a social institution that protects individual dignity from actions that degrade or harm honor. In this

context, the prevention of sexual violence is seen not only as an individual responsibility but also as a collective responsibility of all community members (Anwar et al., 2020) (Butt, 2023).

The urgency to integrate local values like Mitawe into efforts to prevent sexual violence becomes increasingly clear when examining empirical data and field situations. Although various regulations and laws have been enacted to protect women and children from sexual violence, such as the enactment of the Sexual Violence Crimes Law (UUTPKS) No. 12 of 2022, implementation in the field often still faces obstacles (Wirawan & Permatasari, 2022). One of the biggest challenges is the lack of understanding and acceptance of policies that are considered not aligned with local cultural values. Therefore, a more inclusive and adaptive approach is needed, where sexual violence prevention policies and programs are designed considering the local cultural context. This study starts from the understanding that local culture can be an important asset in efforts to prevent sexual violence (Latief et al., 2022). Focusing on the Mitawe Culture in West Sulawesi Province, this study aims to explore how the values contained in this culture can be integrated into sexual violence prevention programs. This research uses an empirical legal approach, where data is collected through field observations, in-depth interviews with traditional leaders and community leaders, and document analysis from the DP3AP2KB of West Sulawesi Province. For more details, refer to the following figure.



Figure 1. State of the Art of Research

Initial observations from this study indicate that the Mitawe Culture has significant potential in supporting efforts to prevent sexual violence (Muh. Chaerul Anwar et al., 2023). For instance, the application of Mitawe values in daily life has proven to increase public awareness of the importance of respecting the rights of women and children (Hidayat, 2019). Values such as Siri, which emphasize the importance of maintaining dignity and honor, can serve as a strong foundation for building a community that rejects sexual violence. Moreover, integrating cultural values into prevention programs can enhance the effectiveness of interventions, as communities tend to be more receptive to programs aligned with their values. Furthermore, collaboration with DP3AP2KB has created opportunities to develop more structured and sustainable prevention strategies (Sukmawati et al., 2024). Through this collaboration, various intervention programs, such as training for victim advocates, public awareness campaigns, and community-based education, have been better implemented. This collaborative approach not only improves the effectiveness of the programs but also ensures that the interventions have a sustainable impact (Syamsu Rijal, 2019). Ultimately, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how local cultural values can be integrated into efforts to prevent sexual violence. By placing the Mitawe Culture at the center of this approach, the study aims to benefit not only the Mandar community in West Sulawesi but also serve as a model adaptable to other regions in Indonesia. This research also emphasizes the importance of an inclusive and culturally sensitive approach in designing sexual violence prevention policies and programs, to create a safer and more dignified environment for all (Fathimah et al., 2022).

## 2. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with an empirical legal method to explore how Mitawe cultural values can be integrated into efforts to prevent sexual violence against women and children in West Sulawesi Province (Barada, 2013). A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to understand the complex social and cultural contexts within the Mandar community, as well as to identify the factors that support or hinder the application of these cultural values in daily life. The research design is descriptive and exploratory, enabling

the researcher to provide a detailed description of social phenomena in the field and delve deeper into the potential of Mitawe cultural values as tools for preventing sexual violence. The stages of this research are as follows:

- 1) Observation, the researcher conducts observations to understand the social and cultural context of the Mandar community in West Sulawesi Province. The researcher also notes the issue of sexual violence against women and children in this community.
- 2) Problem Identification and Formulation, the researcher identifies the problem of sexual violence and the lack of integration of local cultural values in prevention efforts.
- 3) Data Collection, data is collected through various qualitative methods. The sample in this study consists of cases of sexual violence against women and children in West Sulawesi, selected through a purposive sampling technique, focusing on cases directly related to the research.
- 4) Data Analysis and Validation, the collected data is analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key themes relevant to the study. Data triangulation is applied to enhance the validity of the research results by comparing information from various sources and methods.
- 5) Implementation of Activities, based on the data analysis, the researcher develops and implements intervention programs based on Mitawe values.
- 6) Conclusions and Recommendations: After implementing the activities, the researcher formulates conclusions based on the research findings.
- 7) Output, article for Reputable International Journal the research findings are then compiled into a scientific article intended for publication in a reputable international journal. For more details, refer to the following figure.



Figure 2. Research Flow Diagram

The research location was chosen based on the high incidence of sexual violence in the area and the rich cultural heritage preserved within the Mandar community. The study focuses on several regencies in West Sulawesi Province, such as Mamuju, Majene, and Polewali Mandar, known for their unique application of local cultural values. The participants in this research include traditional leaders, community leaders, survivors of sexual violence, their family members, and officials from the Department of Women's Empowerment, Child Protection, Population Control, and Family Planning (DP3AP2KB) of West Sulawesi Province, all of whom play a crucial role in the context of this study. Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. In-depth interviews were used to gain insights into perceptions and practices related to Mitawe values in the context of preventing sexual violence. These interviews were conducted with various stakeholders, including traditional leaders, community leaders, and survivors of sexual violence, to obtain a comprehensive view of how these cultural values are understood and applied. Participant observation involved the direct involvement of the researcher in social and cultural activities within the Mandar community. Through this observation, the researcher was able to directly observe the application of Mitawe values in daily interactions and how these values influence responses to sexual violence. Additionally, document analysis was conducted to understand existing policies and programs and to evaluate the extent to which local cultural values have been integrated into efforts to prevent sexual violence.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

This study reveals several important findings related to the application of Mitawe cultural values in preventing sexual violence against women and children in West Sulawesi Province. First, in-depth interviews with traditional leaders, community leaders, victims of sexual violence, and their families revealed that Mitawe cultural values such as modesty, respect, and maintaining dignity (Siri) play a significant role in reducing the risk of sexual violence in the Mandar community. Traditional and community leaders emphasized that Mitawe is not only an ethical guideline but also a social system that preserves interpersonal relationships and promotes social harmony. These norms are highly valued and widely adhered to by community members, making them an effective mechanism for social control.

Second, participatory observations conducted in several regencies, including Mamuju, Majene, and Polewali Mandar, demonstrated that the application of Mitawe values in daily life significantly affects social interaction patterns within the community. Direct observation of these cultural practices shows that individuals who adhere to Mitawe norms tend to receive more social support and respect within their communities. Conversely, those who violate these norms, especially regarding modesty and respect, often face social sanctions, such as ostracism or reprimands from traditional leaders and the community. This indicates that the Mitawe culture has the power to shape social behaviors that support the prevention of sexual violence.

Third, an analysis of documents from the Department of Women's Empowerment, Child Protection, Population Control, and Family Planning (DP3AP2KB) of West Sulawesi Province showed that sexual violence prevention programs that integrate local cultural values, including Mitawe, are more successful than programs that do not consider cultural aspects. Reports from DP3AP2KB note that in areas where programs emphasize cultural education and strengthening local values, there has been a significant reduction in the number of sexual violence cases. This indicates that culturally-based approaches are not only more accepted by the community but also more effective in the long term.

Further, this study focuses on how integrating Mitawe cultural values can provide a foundation for building more effective sexual violence prevention strategies in West Sulawesi Province. Mitawe culture, which emphasizes modesty, respect, and maintaining dignity (Siri), has long been part of the Mandar community's life and significantly influences social harmony. In the context of preventing sexual violence, these values offer an approach that may be more acceptable to the community compared to legal approaches that are often less sensitive to the local cultural context.

#### **Integration of Mitawe Cultural Values in Preventing Sexual Violence**

Mitawe cultural values have demonstrated significant effectiveness in preventing sexual violence, particularly in maintaining social norms respected by the Mandar community. This study found that communities that apply Mitawe values in daily interactions tend to have lower levels of sexual violence. This can be attributed to the strong social norms governing interpersonal relationships, where modesty and respect are highly regarded. For example, Siri, as a crucial element of Mitawe, teaches the importance of maintaining personal dignity and honor. In communities that uphold Siri values, sexual violence is seen as a severe violation of honor and dignity, not only for the victim but also for their family and community. The social pressure to maintain honor can serve as a strong deterrent to sexual violence. When a community collectively rejects sexual violence as a degrading act, the potential for such violence can be significantly reduced.

However, the effectiveness of these values is not separate from the existing social and cultural context. In some communities, norms like Siri can impose heavy pressure on individuals, especially women, to remain silent when they are victims of sexual violence. This is because women may feel that reporting sexual violence would tarnish the family's or community's reputation, which is integral to the concept of Siri. Thus, although Mitawe values can act as a deterrent to sexual violence, there is a risk that these norms could also hinder victims from seeking justice and support.

#### **Comparison with Legal Approaches**

The legal approach to preventing sexual violence in Indonesia is often universal, emphasizing law enforcement and the imposition of sanctions on perpetrators. This approach is crucial in the context of a legal state, where every citizen has the same right to legal protection. However, in many cases, this legal approach faces significant challenges when applied in communities with strong cultural norms, such as those in West Sulawesi. Law



enforcement that does not consider the local cultural context is often less effective because the community may not fully support or even understand the policy. For instance, in some cases, communities are more likely to resolve sexual violence cases traditionally than report them to authorities. This can result in injustice for victims, especially when traditional resolutions do not impose adequate sanctions on perpetrators or fail to provide sufficient restitution for victims.

On the other hand, a culturally-based approach, as proposed in this study, offers a more sensitive alternative to the local context. By integrating cultural values such as Mitawe into sexual violence prevention strategies, the designed policies and programs can be more acceptable and effective at the community level. For example, education programs designed to promote Mitawe values may be more successful in changing behaviors and increasing community awareness about the importance of respecting women's and children's rights. However, it is essential to remember that this culturally-based approach requires clear and comprehensive policy support to ensure that these cultural values genuinely support violence prevention and do not reinforce existing stereotypes or injustices. For instance, policies that focus only on promoting cultural values without balancing them with strong law enforcement could risk creating impunity for perpetrators of sexual violence.

#### Challenges in Integrating Cultural Values and Upholding Human Rights

One of the main challenges in integrating Mitawe cultural values in preventing sexual violence is the potential conflict with universal human rights principles, particularly related to gender equality. Although values like Siri emphasize the importance of maintaining dignity, in some contexts, these cultural norms can be a barrier for women to obtain justice or full support when they become victims of sexual violence. For example, social pressure to maintain family honor may discourage women from reporting or seeking help when they are victims of sexual violence. This not only hinders the law enforcement process but can also worsen the trauma experienced by the victim.

Moreover, there is a risk that strong cultural norms can be used to justify actions that harm women or other vulnerable groups. For example, in some cases, cultural values that teach obedience and sacrifice may be used to pressure victims not to resist or report the violence they experience. Therefore, it is essential to ensure that integrating cultural values in preventing sexual violence not only respects local traditions but also aligns with human rights principles that support equality and justice for all individuals. To address these challenges, a more inclusive and dialogical approach is needed, where stakeholders from various backgrounds, including traditional leaders, the government, and civil society organizations, can work together to develop sexual violence prevention strategies that respect local cultural values while ensuring equal protection for all individuals. This includes ensuring that education programs and awareness campaigns not only promote cultural values but also emphasize the importance of human rights and gender equality.

#### Collaboration between Government, Traditional Leaders, and the Community

This study emphasizes the importance of collaboration between local governments, traditional leaders, and community organizations in developing culturally-based sexual violence prevention programs. Local governments play a crucial role in providing a policy framework that allows the integration of cultural values into sexual violence prevention programs. This can be done through the formulation of policies that support the implementation of cultural education programs in schools and at the community level. Moreover, traditional leaders and community leaders can be effective agents of change in disseminating and enforcing these values at the local level. They have a significant influence on shaping and maintaining social norms, so their involvement in sexual violence prevention programs is essential. Traditional leaders can also ensure that the cultural values applied support the protection of women and children and do not reinforce discriminatory or harmful norms.

Civil society organizations also play an essential role in supporting culturally-based sexual violence prevention efforts. They can help develop training programs and awareness campaigns designed to strengthen positive cultural values while promoting human rights and gender equality. In addition, civil society organizations can serve as a link between the government, communities, and victims of sexual violence, ensuring that voices often unheard in decision-making processes are represented and considered. This collaboration must be balanced with ongoing education efforts to ensure that all community members understand and support efforts to prevent sexual violence, both from a cultural and legal perspective. Education can include training for community leaders, public awareness programs, and providing resources for victims of sexual violence to seek help and justice.

Thus, culturally-based sexual violence prevention strategies can be effectively integrated into the community's daily life, creating a safer and more supportive environment for all community members.

#### Policy Implications and Recommendations

The findings from this study have several important implications for future policy development. First, there is an urgent need to design sexual violence prevention programs that are not only based on law but also consider the local cultural context. These programs must be designed with the involvement of traditional leaders and community leaders who have strong influence in shaping social norms. For example, policies supporting training for traditional leaders and community leaders on how to integrate cultural values into sexual violence prevention efforts could be an essential first step. Second, it is important to develop educational materials and public awareness campaigns that integrate Mitawe cultural values. These materials should be designed in a way that is accessible and understandable to all community members, including those in rural areas with lower education levels. Public awareness campaigns involving local arts, traditions, and language can help disseminate important messages related to preventing sexual violence more effectively and sustainably. Third, there needs to be a structured evaluation and monitoring mechanism to ensure that the programs implemented are running as expected and can be adjusted based on emerging needs in the field. Local governments, in collaboration with civil society organizations and traditional leaders, can form monitoring teams responsible for overseeing the implementation of these programs, ensuring that they genuinely provide effective protection against sexual violence and support gender equality.

#### 4. Conclusion

The integration of Mitawe cultural values in efforts to prevent sexual violence shows great potential in creating a safe and supportive environment for women and children in West Sulawesi Province. These cultural values not only serve as ethical guidelines for community members but also act as mechanisms for social control that promote respect, modesty, and social harmony. However, it is essential to ensure that integrating these cultural values does not conflict with universal human rights principles, particularly related to gender equality. Thus, a balanced approach that integrates cultural values with law enforcement is needed to prevent sexual violence more effectively and comprehensively. Collaboration between local governments, traditional leaders, and civil society organizations is essential in developing and implementing these strategies to ensure that all community members are involved and support these efforts. By combining these approaches, it is hoped that we can create a safer and more just environment for all individuals, particularly women and children, in West Sulawesi Province.

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