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Gender perspectives on criminal law protection for child sexual violence in Aceh

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ABSTRACT

Sexual violence against children remains a major legal and human rights issue in Indonesia, particularly in Aceh where formal criminal law operates in a unique socio-cultural environment shaped by Islamic values, customary norms (adat) and patriarchal gender relations. However, there is limited empirical evidence on how these legal, religious, cultural and institutional dimensions interact to shape gender-responsive protection for child victims of sexual violence in Aceh. The study aimed to explore gender perspectives on the protection provided by criminal law for child victims of sexual violence and to investigate institutional, socio-cultural, and psychosocial factors that influence their access to justice and recovery. This paper is based on a qualitative socio-legal study involving 12 participants selected purposively from Banda Aceh, Aceh Besar and Pidie. The participants are law enforcers, victim advocates, psychologists, DP3A/P2TP2A officers and family members of the victims. The data were collected via in-depth semi-structured interviews and were analyzed thematically. The findings showed that legal practices did not systematically incorporate gender-responsive and trauma-informed principles and that procedural requirements often prevailed over the psychological and emotional needs of the victims. Protection and recovery was further limited by social stigma, patriarchal norms, limited institutional capacity, inadequate professional training and weak inter-

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agency coordination. Complementary legal and psychosocial roles were played by law enforcement and victim assistance institutions. The study concludes that child protection in Aceh is affected by the interaction of formal criminal law, institutional practices and socio-cultural norms. To advance equitable and child-centered justice, it is essential to strengthen gender-responsive professional capacity, trauma-informed services, inter-agency coordination and culturally adaptive protection mechanisms.

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Keywords: Child Sexual Violence; Criminal Law Protection; Gender-Responsive Justice; Aceh; Socio-Legal Study.

ABSTRAK

Kekerasan seksual terhadap anak masih menjadi persoalan hukum dan hak asasi manusia yang serius di Indonesia, khususnya di Aceh, di mana hukum pidana formal diterapkan dalam lingkungan sosial budaya yang unik, yang dibentuk oleh nilai-nilai Islam, norma adat, dan relasi gender patriarkal. Namun, bukti empiris mengenai bagaimana dimensi hukum, agama, budaya, dan kelembagaan tersebut saling berinteraksi dalam membentuk perlindungan yang responsif gender bagi anak korban kekerasan seksual di Aceh masih terbatas. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi perspektif gender terhadap perlindungan yang diberikan oleh hukum pidana bagi anak korban kekerasan seksual serta mengkaji faktor kelembagaan, sosial budaya, dan psikososial yang memengaruhi akses mereka terhadap keadilan dan pemulihan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan sosio-legal kualitatif yang melibatkan 12 partisipan yang dipilih secara purposif dari Banda Aceh, Aceh Besar, dan Pidie. Partisipan terdiri atas aparat penegak hukum, pendamping korban, psikolog, petugas DP3A/P2TP2A, dan anggota keluarga korban. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam semi-terstruktur dan dianalisis secara tematik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa praktik hukum belum secara sistematis mengintegrasikan prinsip-prinsip responsif gender dan pendekatan yang berorientasi pada trauma, sementara persyaratan prosedural sering kali lebih diutamakan daripada kebutuhan psikologis dan emosional korban. Perlindungan dan pemulihan juga masih terbatas oleh stigma sosial, norma patriarkal, keterbatasan kapasitas kelembagaan, kurangnya pelatihan profesional, dan lemahnya koordinasi antarlembaga. Aparat penegak hukum dan lembaga pendamping korban menjalankan peran yang saling melengkapi dalam aspek hukum dan psikososial. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa perlindungan anak di Aceh dipengaruhi oleh interaksi antara hukum pidana formal, praktik kelembagaan, dan norma sosial budaya. Untuk mewujudkan keadilan yang setara dan berpusat pada anak, diperlukan penguatan kapasitas profesional yang responsif gender, layanan yang berorientasi pada trauma, koordinasi antarlembaga, serta mekanisme perlindungan yang adaptif terhadap konteks budaya.

Kata Kunci: Kekerasan Seksual Terhadap Anak; Perlindungan Hukum Pidana; Keadilan Responsif Gender; Aceh; Studi Sosio-Legal.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Sexual violence against children continues to be a serious legal, social and human rights problem because of its profound impact on children's physical safety, psychological well-being, and access to justice (Wessells & Kostelny, 2021). Legal systems are increasingly recognizing the rights of children as rights holders, who require special protection. However, the effectiveness of the protection of children depends not only on the existence of substantive legal provisions but also on the response of criminal justice institutions to victims in the processes of reporting, investigation, prosecution and recovery (Yanto et al., 2020). Gender-insensitive questioning, inadequate psychological support, and a focus on procedure rather than substance can lead to secondary victimization of child victims and to a lack of meaningful access to justice (Lorenz et al., 2019).

Legal protection for child victims of sexual violence in Indonesia has been developed through criminal law, child protection law, and institutional mechanisms involving law enforcement agencies and victim assistance services (Zakaria et al., 2023). However, formal legal protection does not necessarily ensure gender-sensitive and child-friendly implementation. Institutional capacity, professional competence, coordination among service providers, social stigma, and prevailing gender norms may affect the victim's experience of the justice process (Nurliyantika & Jannah, 2023). Therefore, to understand child protection, it is necessary to focus not only on the legal rules but also on the institutional and socio-cultural environments in which these rules are applied (Wright et al., 2025).

Aceh offers a particularly critical socio-legal context in which to explore these dynamics. Formal criminal law and child protection mechanisms occur in a specific normative environment determined by Islamic values, customary norms, community expectations, and patriarchal gender relations (Bastiar et al., 2025). In cases of sexual violence, issues of family honor, morality, social reputation, and community responses can interact with formal legal procedures and institutional practices (Hasbi et al., 2025). These interactions can influence reporting decisions, victims' willingness to engage in legal processes, institutional response, and access to psychosocial support. Hence, the Acehnese contextualization provides an opportunity to study legal protection not only as the implementation of formal criminal law but as a process which is constructed through the interaction of law, institutions, gendered relations, and socio-cultural norms (Melvin et al., 2023).

Past research identified the primary challenges in protecting child sexual violence victims as social stigma, patriarchal norms, institutional constraints, secondary victimization, and insufficient trauma-informed practices (Utari et al., 2026). However, these dimensions have often been studied separately with little empirical understanding of how formal criminal law, Islamic values, customary norms (*adat*), gender relations, and institutional practices interact in shaping the protection and recovery of child victims in the specific socio-legal context of Aceh. Furthermore, little attention has been paid to how the different parties involved, such as law enforcement officers, victim advocates, psychologists, child protection institutions and victims' families, perceive and negotiate these intersecting factors in one analytical framework. This gap is especially important because the effectiveness of legal protection may depend on the interaction between formal legal mechanisms and the normative and institutional environments in which they operate.

To fill this gap, this study discusses the gender perspective of the protection of criminal law for child victims of sexual violence in Banda Aceh, Aceh Besar, and Pidie. It looks at the kinds of legal protection that victims receive, institutional and socio-cultural barriers to effective protection, the role of law enforcement and victim assistance institutions, and ways to strengthen gender-responsive and trauma-informed justice. This study provides an empirically grounded socio-legal understanding of the interaction between formal criminal law and institutional practices and the socio-cultural and normative context of Aceh by including perspectives of multiple stakeholders, and thereby informs more culturally adaptive, gender-responsive and child-centered approaches to victim protection.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Child Sexual Violence and Criminal Law Protection

The literature generally accepts that child sexual violence is a multi-dimensional problem and that more than formal criminalization and prosecution is required. To be most effective in law substantive criminal law needs to be supplemented by child-sensitive procedures, psychological support, confidentiality safeguards, and accessible victim assistance (Gerbaka et al., 2021). The literature is generally agrees that formal legal recognition does not necessarily translate into effective protection at the stages of investigation, prosecution, and recovery. But the studies disagree on how to explain the implementation gap. Some attribute the problem to gender norms, stigma, and socio-cultural expectations of victims and their families, while others cite institutional constraints such as lack of professional capacity and fragmented services (Maharani et al., 2023). It is an important distinction as it reveals that the weaknesses of victim protection are not only due to the shortcomings of criminal law but also due to the institutional and social contexts of criminal law.

2.2. Gender-Responsive and Trauma-Informed Justice

Gender-responsive and trauma-informed approaches provide complementary lenses for examining the experiences of child victims within the criminal justice system. Gender-responsive justice in sexual violence underscores the role of gender stereotypes, power disparities, victim blaming, and assumptions about female sexuality in shaping educational institutions' responses (Green et al., 2026). Trauma-informed approaches are the opposite of trauma-informed approaches. Approaches stress emotional safety, avoiding repetitive or intimidating questions, identifying trauma-related responses, and preventing secondary victimization. Both challenge dominant proceduralist approaches to justice but the literature does not always analytically integrate the two perspectives (Saunders et al., 2023). Gender studies interrogate structural inequalities and patriarchal norms; trauma-informed research interrogates psychological consequences and professional practice. This is particularly important in the case of sexual violence against children, because victims of this type of violence may experience psychological trauma and gendered social judgment during the legal process (Kalra & Bhugra, 2013).

2.3. Stigma, Patriarchal Norms, and Victim Protection

Research has shown that stigma and patriarchal gender norms create barriers to reporting sexual violence and accessing legal protection. Fear of shame, of the reputation of the

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family, of social judgment, and victim blaming may deter victims and families from approaching formal justice institutions (Flynn et al., 2026). But the literature is inconsistent on how these barriers formed and how they work. Some authors consider stigma as primarily a cultural problem at the community level, while others highlight its reproduction through institutional practices and gender insensitive responses in the justice system itself (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2013). This distinction suggests that stigma should not be understood simply as a cultural barrier from the outside. Rather, the effects may be worked out in the interplay of family expectations, community norms, gender relations and institutional responses. Such an intersectional understanding is especially relevant in socio-legal contexts where formal legal processes are superimposed onto strong normative and customary structures (Mitchell et al., 2026).

2.4. Islamic Values, Adat, and Legal Pluralism in Aceh

Aceh offers a unique setting to explore these interactions where formal state law coexists with Islamic normative systems, adat customs and locally situated social expectations. Islamic values, adat, and patriarchal practices should not be treated as interchangeable but should be analytically distinguished (Salim, 2021). Islamic normative principles may provide ethical bases for protection of children, dignity, justice, and vulnerable persons. Specific customary or patriarchal interpretations may affect community concepts of sexuality, family honor, gender roles, and appropriate responses to sexual violence (Dahash, 2025). The co-existence of these normative orders creates a version of socio-legal pluralism in which victims and families may simultaneously face formal criminal law, religious expectations, customary practices and community pressures (Aulia et al., 2025).

This plural normative environment can both facilitate and hinder victim protection. Religious and communal values may reinforce responsibilities to protect children and prevent harm, but shame, morality, family reputation or social consequences may also influence reporting and participation in formal legal proceedings (Mahmud & Islam, 2021). The key analytical question, therefore, is not whether Islamic or customary norms are inherently supportive or detrimental to victims, but how formal criminal law, Islamic values, adat, gender relations, and institutional practices interact in actual processes of protection and recovery. This distinction is important for avoiding a simplistic attribution of patriarchal practices to Islam while offering a more contextualized analysis of gender and justice in Aceh (Hasbi et al., 2025).

2.5. Institutional Coordination and Child-Friendly Justice

There is also broad consensus in the literature that protecting children requires coordination among law enforcement, psychological services, social workers, victim advocates, and governmental child protection agencies. But institutional coordination is often treated as an administrative problem and not as a wider socio-legal process through which protection is provided (Bah, 2022). Weak referral mechanisms, uneven professional capacity, limited psychological services and limited communication between institutions can fragment the experiences of victims over the different stages of the justice process (Ahmedova et al., 2025). Effective coordination, therefore, is not only about institutional cooperation from a child-friendly justice perspective, but also about a shared commitment to gender-responsive, trauma-informed and victim-centered practices (De Angulo et al., 2025).

This problem is especially important when legal institutions function in strong sociocultural environments. Institutional actors are not immune to prevailing gender norms, religious values or community expectations. Hence, their conception of victim protection may be different depending on professional roles and institutional mandates (Weiss, 2023). Comparison of the perspectives of law enforcement officers, psychologists, victim advocates, child protection officers and victims' families can reveal the ways that different actors understand and negotiate the relationship between legal procedure, psychological recovery and socio-cultural expectations (Johansen et al., 2023).

2.6. Research Gap and Conceptual Positioning

Past research shows that legal protection for child victims of sexual violence may be constrained by stigma, patriarchal norms, institutional limitations, secondary victimization, and insufficient trauma-informed practices. However, limited empirical attention has been given to how these factors interact within Aceh's distinctive socio-legal context, particularly at the intersection of formal criminal law, Islamic values, adat, gender relations, and institutional practices. This study addresses this gap through a multi-stakeholder qualitative socio-legal analysis involving law enforcement officers, psychologists, victim advocates, child protection institutions, and victims' families in Banda Aceh, Aceh Besar, and Pidie. Rather than treating legal and socio-cultural dimensions separately, the study conceptualizes child protection as an interconnected process shaping access to justice and recovery. The research gap and conceptual positioning of the study are illustrated in Figure 1.

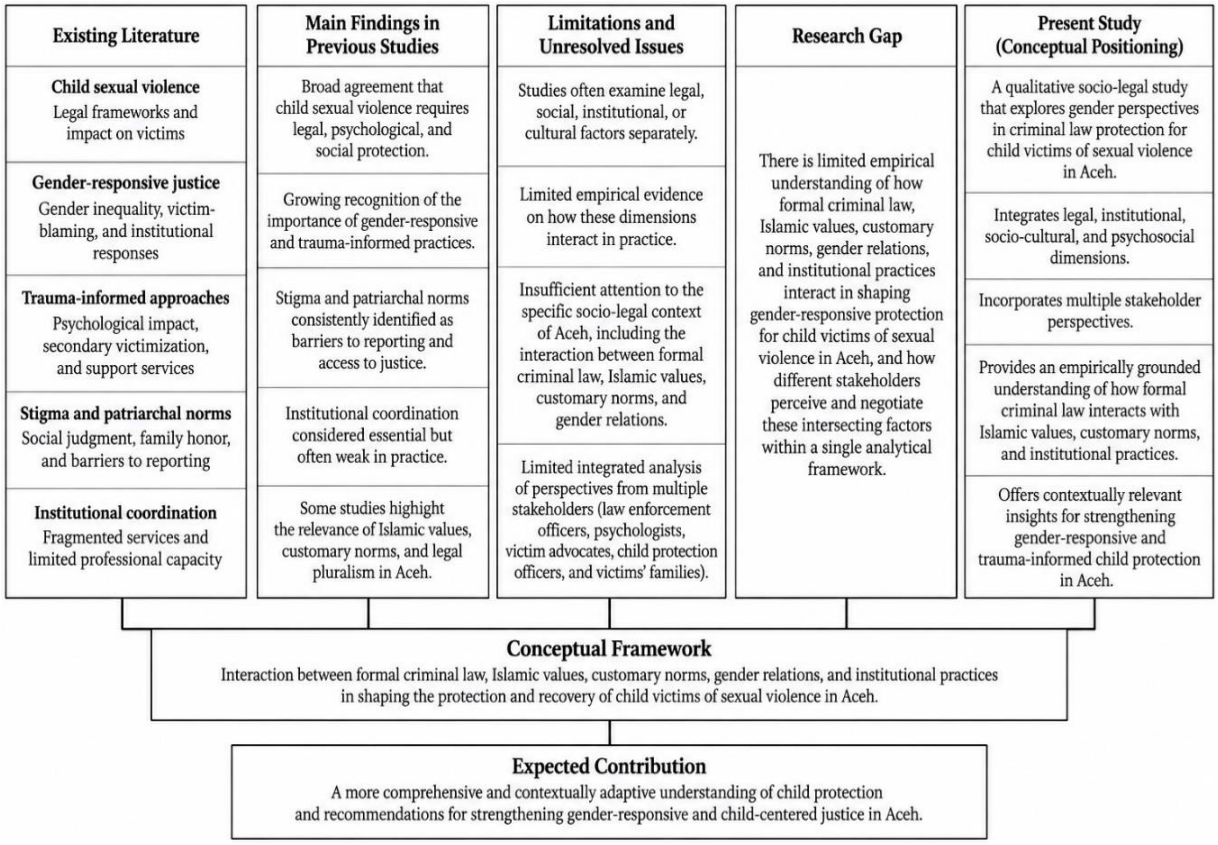


Figure 1. Research gap and conceptual positioning of the study on gender-responsive criminal law protection for child victims of sexual violence in Aceh.

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3. METHOD

3.1. Study Design

This study employed a qualitative socio-legal design to examine gender perspectives in criminal law protection for child victims of sexual violence in Aceh, Indonesia. The socio-legal approach was used to analyze the interaction between formal legal processes, institutional practices, and the socio-cultural context in which child protection mechanisms operate. The study was conducted in Banda Aceh, Aceh Besar, and Pidie, three purposively selected areas representing different institutional and socio-cultural settings in the handling of child sexual violence cases in Aceh. This design enabled the study to examine legal protection not only as a formal legal process but also as a practice shaped by institutional, gender, and socio-cultural dynamics.

3.2. Participants and Sampling Technique

Participants were purposively selected based on their direct professional or personal involvement in child sexual violence cases. A total of 12 participants were recruited from Banda Aceh, Aceh Besar, and Pidie, comprising four law enforcement officers, two victim advocates, two psychologists, two DP3A/P2TP2A officers, and two victims' family members. Eligibility was determined by relevant experience or knowledge of legal protection, victim assistance, psychosocial support, or institutional responses, as well as willingness to participate and provide informed consent. Participants from diverse professional and experiential backgrounds were included to capture multi-stakeholder perspectives on the legal, institutional, psychosocial, and socio-cultural dimensions of child victim protection. Participant characteristics are presented in Table 1.

3.3. Data Saturation

Participant recruitment and data collection were conducted iteratively alongside preliminary analysis. Data adequacy was assessed by examining whether successive interviews generated substantively new codes, categories, or perspectives relevant to the research questions. Data collection was considered sufficient when subsequent interviews largely reinforced previously identified categories and no substantively new themes emerged. On this basis, the 12 interviews were considered adequate to capture the principal patterns across the stakeholder groups included in this study.

3.4. Data Collection

Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted from January to April 2026. Interviews were conducted face-to-face in private settings and lasted approximately 45–90 minutes. Five areas were explored: gender perspectives, criminal law protection, socio-cultural and institutional barriers, institutional roles and coordination, and strategies for strengthening gender-responsive, trauma-informed, and child-friendly protection. Field notes and reflective memos were used to support contextual interpretation and researcher reflexivity, while interviews were treated as the primary empirical data source.

3.5. Data Analysis and Coding

Interview data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis was conducted through transcript familiarization, open coding, grouping of related

codes into categories, development and review of candidate themes, refinement of final themes, and interpretation within the socio-legal context of Aceh. Similarities and differences across stakeholder groups and study sites were considered where supported by the data. Participant quotations were used to support thematic interpretations. Final themes were organized into thematic tables and conceptual figures to illustrate the relationships among legal, institutional, socio-cultural, and psychosocial dimensions of child protection.

3.6. Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of the findings was established through credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Credibility was strengthened through source triangulation and member checking. Dependability was ensured through consistent interview and thematic analysis procedures, while confirmability was supported by participant accounts, field notes, and reflective memos. Transferability was enhanced through detailed descriptions of the study setting, participant characteristics, and socio-cultural context of Aceh.

3.7. Ethical considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with ethical principles for human research and was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Syiah Kuala, Banda Aceh, Indonesia (Approval No. 244/ETIK-FKIP/USK/2026). All participants provided written informed consent. Privacy, confidentiality, and psychological safety were maintained throughout the study. Participants were identified using codes (I-01–I-12), identifying information was removed, and research data were securely stored and accessible only to the research team.

Table 1.
Characteristics of Research Participants (n = 12).

Characteristic	**Category**	**n**	**%**
Study area	Banda Aceh	5	41.7
	Aceh Besar	3	25.0
	Pidie	4	33.3
Participant category	Law enforcement officers	4	33.3
	Victim advocates	2	16.7
	Psychologists	2	16.7
	DP3A/P2TP2A officers	2	16.7
	Victims' family members	2	16.7
Gender	Female	9	75.0
	Male	3	25.0
Work experience	<5 years	0	0.0
	5–10 years	8	66.7
	>10 years	2	16.7
	Not applicable/not employed[1]	2	16.7

Note. DP3A = *Office of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection*; P2TP2A = *Integrated Service Center for Women and Children Empowerment*. [1]Not applicable/not employed refers to participants recruited as victims' family members, for whom professional work experience in handling child sexual violence cases was not applicable.

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4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Gender Perspectives in the Handling of Child Sexual Violence Cases

Table 2 shows that the gender-sensitive and trauma-informed principles were not systematically integrated into the management of child sexual violence cases. Repetitive questioning, limited attention to emotional safety, and gender-related stigma were perceived to enhance psychological distress and risk of re-traumatisation. These findings suggest a disconnect between procedural legal protection and victim-centered protection whereby compliance with formal procedures does not necessarily ensure that children perceive the justice process as safe and protective. This interpretation is consistent with evidence from Indonesia, which suggests that child sexual violence is still hard to address due to the interaction of legal complexity, cultural sensitivity, barriers to disclosure, and weaknesses in existing protection mechanisms (Young et al., 2025).

Table 2.
Gender Perspective Issues in the Handling of Child Sexual Violence Cases.

Theme/Analytical Category	Key Findings	Interpretation	Participant Quotation
Gender sensitivity in case handling	Gender-sensitive approaches were not consistently applied during case handling and victim examination.	Formal procedures remained more prominent than attention to victims' gender-specific vulnerabilities and emotional needs.	"Victims often feel afraid during questioning because investigators repeatedly ask sensitive questions." (I-03)
Examination practices	Sensitive issues could be explored repeatedly during the examination process.	Repetitive questioning may increase psychological distress and reduce victims' sense of safety during legal proceedings.	*Insert a different supporting quotation if available.*
Risk of retraumatization	Procedural interactions were perceived as potentially reproducing fear and emotional distress.	Insufficiently trauma-informed procedures may contribute to secondary victimization.	*Insert supporting quotation from transcript.*
Gender-related stigma	Female child victims were perceived as particularly vulnerable to social judgment and stigma.	Gender norms surrounding sexuality, morality, and family reputation may influence victims' experiences of the legal process.	*Insert supporting quotation from transcript.*

Need for trauma-informed protection	Psychological safety and child-friendly communication were considered important during legal proceedings.	Gender-responsive protection should be integrated with trauma-informed and child-centered practices.	*Insert supporting quotation from psychologist/advocate where available.*

The findings also emphasize the significance of gender sensitivity at the investigative stage. In Indonesia, previous studies have found significant attrition in cases of child sexual abuse at the stage of police investigation, with only 32% of the 179 studied cases being prosecuted, indicating the challenge of translating formal legal protection into meaningful access to justice (Sumampouw et al., 2020). More recent studies have found similar barriers to the application of the best interests of child victims in police investigations, such as lack of professional understanding, limited supporting facilities, inadequate technical procedures and socio-cultural influences (Kyei-Gyamfi et al., 2026). Gender responsive justice must therefore extend beyond equal treatment in procedure to include recognition of the intersecting effects of age, gender, trauma, power imbalance and social stigma on children's experiences of criminal proceedings.

The findings are particularly relevant to Aceh which has a plural socio-legal context in child protection including national law, Islamic legal norms and customary practices. The patriarchal cultural practices are to be distinguished from the Islamic normative principles. Islamic values of justice, dignity and protection of vulnerable persons may support victim protection, while patriarchal norms, family honor and customary expectations may contribute to stigma or constraint on disclosure (Roslaili et al., 2026). Effective protection must be gender-responsive, trauma-informed and child-centred incorporating psychologically safe interviewing, psychosocial support and sensitivity to gender-based stigma. The findings demonstrate that child protection in Aceh is built on the intersection of formal law, institutional practices, gendered power relations, Islamic normative values, and customary norms, resulting in culturally sensitive and victim-centred criminal justice responses.

4.2. Forms and Implementation of Legal Protection for Child Victims

Table 3 indicates that protection to child victims of sexual violence was provided through legal assistance, child friendly examination, psychological support, confidentiality and identity protection, rehabilitation and institutional victim assistance. These mechanisms were seen as complementary, rather than independent, forms of protection. Psychological assistance was stressed, since participation in legal proceedings could increase victims' fear and trauma. "Psychological assistance is very important because many child victims experience fear and trauma during the legal process" (I-04), said one participant. However, the application of these protections was not always consistent, particularly when it came to the provision of child-friendly services, continuity of psychological support and access to rehabilitation.

Table 3.
Forms and Implementation of Legal Protection for Child Victims of Sexual Violence.

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Form of Legal Protection	Implementation in Practice	Identified Implementation Issue	Evidence
Legal assistance	Legal assistance and advocacy were provided during investigation and subsequent legal proceedings.	Availability and continuity of assistance were not always uniform.	Participants described legal assistance and advocacy as important for helping victims and families understand and navigate investigation and subsequent legal proceedings.
Child-friendly examination	Efforts were made to conduct examinations in settings and through procedures intended to reduce fear and discomfort.	Child-friendly facilities and practices were not consistently available.	Participants emphasized the need for examination procedures that provide psychological safety and avoid intimidating or repetitive questioning of child victims.
Psychological support	Psychological assessment, counseling, and emotional support were provided during legal proceedings and recovery.	Access to psychologists and continuity of psychological support remained limited in some cases.	*"Psychological assistance is very important because many child victims experience fear and trauma during the legal process"* (I-04).
Confidentiality and identity protection	Victims' identities and personal information were protected during case handling.	Maintaining confidentiality could be challenging within close social and community environments.	Participants identified confidentiality and protection of victims' identities as essential to reducing stigma and protecting children from further social and psychological harm.
Rehabilitation and recovery	Psychosocial rehabilitation and recovery-oriented assistance were provided following victim assessment.	Long-term recovery services were not always equally accessible.	Participants emphasized that protection should continue beyond legal proceedings through psychological recovery, psychosocial rehabilitation, and support for victims' reintegration.
Victim assistance and institutional support	DP3A/P2TP2A, advocates, psychologists, and other relevant institutions provided complementary assistance.	Service effectiveness depended on institutional capacity and coordination.	Participant accounts indicated that legal, psychological, and social assistance were complementary and required coordination among law enforcement, DP3A/P2TP2A,

	psychologists, advocates, and families.

These findings show that the protection of criminal law should not only be restricted to investigation and prosecution. Thus, effective protection requires attention to the legal rights and psychological safety, confidentiality, dignity and recovery of victims simultaneously. This interpretation is consistent with the Indonesian child protection framework that recognizes rehabilitation, physical and psychological safety, and assistance and access to information on legal proceedings as important components of protection for child victims (Aprilianda et al., 2025). Likewise, previous studies in Indonesia have emphasized the necessity of providing legal assistance and psychological support throughout the whole justice process (Raharjanti et al., 2026). Thus one may distinguish between procedural protection which makes participation in criminal proceedings possible and substantive protection which seeks to prevent further injury and to promote recovery.

This distinction is particularly relevant in the Aceh context where victim protection occurs in a plural socio-legal environment of national criminal law, Islamic legal norms, customary expectations and multiple protection institutions. Previous socio-legal research in Aceh has shown that the interaction between legal and institutional mechanisms can influence the management of cases of child sexual violence and the experience of protection for victims (Bukido et al., 2026). The current findings extend this view by showing that the effectiveness of protection is not merely a matter of the formal availability of services, but of how legal assistance, psychological care, confidentiality, rehabilitation and institutional support are translated into coordinated practices. It is important to distinguish between the normative Islamic principles of dignity, justice and protection from harm, and patriarchal or customary practices that may be operating within the wider social environment. This interpretation adds to a wider socio-legal understanding that the effectiveness of child protection in Aceh is not only related to the existence of formal criminal law, but also to its interaction with institutional capacity, gender-sensitive practices, psychosocial services and the local normative context (Fatahillah & Luhuringbudi, 2025).

4.3. Social, Cultural, and Institutional Barriers to Legal Protection

As shown in Table 4, barriers to effective legal protection were identified across social, cultural, psychosocial, and institutional dimensions. Social stigma and concerns regarding family honor and community reputation could discourage disclosure and formal reporting, with some families preferring that cases be resolved privately. As one participant stated, *"There are still families who prefer to resolve cases informally because they are afraid of social stigma"* (I-06). Trauma, fear, shame, and emotional distress further complicated victims' participation in legal proceedings. These findings are consistent with Indonesian evidence showing that stigma, cultural sensitivity surrounding sexuality, fear of disclosure, and inadequate support can restrict children's access to protection and justice (Nurbayani et al., 2022).

Table 4.
Social, Cultural, and Institutional Barriers to Legal Protection for Child Victims of Sexual Violence.

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Barrier Dimension	Key Findings	Implications for Victim Protection	Participant Evidence
Social stigma	Victims and families experienced concerns about social judgment and community stigma.	Reporting and continued participation in legal proceedings could be discouraged.	Participant accounts indicated that fear of negative social judgment and stigma influenced how victims and families responded to sexual violence cases and could discourage engagement with formal legal processes.
Family honor and community reputation	Concerns about family dignity and reputation influenced responses to sexual violence cases.	Some families preferred that cases remain private or be resolved outside formal processes.	*"There are still families who prefer to resolve cases informally because they are afraid of social stigma"* (I-06).
Patriarchal gender norms	Gendered expectations and moral judgments particularly affected female victims.	Victim-blaming and reluctance to disclose experiences could be reinforced.	Participants described gendered social expectations and moral judgments as factors that could place additional pressure on female victims and contribute to victim-blaming, shame, and reluctance to disclose sexual violence.
Trauma and fear	Fear, shame, psychological distress, and trauma affected victims' ability to engage with legal processes.	Disclosure, testimony, and continued participation in proceedings could be impaired.	Participants reported that fear and trauma could affect victims' willingness and ability to disclose their experiences and participate in legal proceedings, particularly when sensitive experiences had to be repeatedly discussed.
Limited institutional capacity	Shortages of trained personnel, psychologists, child-friendly facilities, and gender-sensitive training were identified.	The quality and continuity of victim-centered services were constrained.	Participant accounts identified limitations in trained personnel, access to psychological support, child-friendly facilities, and gender-sensitive professional capacity as constraints on consistent victim-centered protection.
Weak inter-agency coordination	Coordination among law enforcement, psychological services, and victim-assistance institutions was not consistently integrated.	Fragmented assistance could affect continuity of protection and recovery.	Participants indicated that coordination among law enforcement, DP3A/P2TP2A, psychologists, and victim advocates was not always fully integrated, potentially disrupting continuity between legal assistance, psychosocial support, and recovery services.

Importantly, these barriers were not experienced in isolation. Victims' psychological vulnerability may be exacerbated by patriarchal gender norms, family expectations and community judgments, especially in cases where girls are subject to moral judgments or concerns about family reputation. In Aceh, these findings should be understood in a plural socio-legal context in which formal law interacts with Islamic normative values and customary practices (Djawas et al., 2025). But Islamic principles should not be conflated with patriarchal practices. Principles of justice, dignity, protection from harm, and the best interests of children may support victim protection . Stigma or pressure for informal settlement may be increased by particular patriarchal interpretations and social practices. The results thus suggest that socio-cultural context can be a potential source of protection as well as constraint depending on the way normative values are interpreted and practiced.

Institutional barriers prevented the effective protection of formal rights, especially due to shortages of trained personnel, psychological services, child-friendly facilities, gender-sensitive capacity, and inter-agency coordination (Gupta & Mukherjee, 2025). These limitations intersected with socio-cultural pressures where stigma and family concerns might deter reporting and fragmented services might further deter victims' engagement with formal legal processes. Barriers to child protection in Aceh are thus shaped by the intersection of gender relations, family and community expectations, trauma, institutional capacity and Islamic and customary normative contexts (Bukido et al., 2026). Overcoming these barriers requires gender-responsive and trauma-informed services, improved institutional coordination, and culturally sensitive community engagement. Restorative approaches, where legally appropriate, should support victim recovery and social reintegration rather than replace criminal accountability.

4.4. Roles and Coordination of Law Enforcement and Victim Assistance Institutions

Table 5 shows the complementary roles of law enforcement and victim-assistance institutions in the protection of child victims. The police, prosecutors and judges were mainly responsible for the investigation, prosecution, judicial proceedings and legal accountability, whereas psychosocial support, legal assistance, referral and recovery-oriented services were provided by DP3A/P2TP2A officers, psychologists, and victim advocates. However, the participants reported that these roles were not always fully integrated. Some officers are still more focused on the procedural requirements than on understanding the psychological condition of the victim" (I-01). This finding highlights a possible conflict between procedural legal requirements and victim-oriented psychosocial needs, highlighting the necessity of coordinated multidisciplinary protection.

Table 5.
Roles and Coordination of Law Enforcement and Victim Assistance Institutions in Child Sexual Violence Cases.

Stakeholder	Primary Role	Protection Orientation	Coordination with Other Institutions	Key Issues Identified
Police	Investigation, victim examination,	Predominantly legal and procedural, with	Coordination with prosecutors,	Trauma-informed and gender-

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	evidence collection, and case processing	child-protection considerations	DP3A/P2TP2A, psychologists, and victim advocates	sensitive practices were not always consistently applied
Prosecutors	Prosecution, legal assessment, and preparation of cases for court	Legal accountability and procedural compliance	Coordination with police, courts, and relevant victim-support services	Victim needs may receive less emphasis than evidentiary and procedural requirements
Judges	Judicial examination, decision-making, and protection of victims' legal rights	Legal justice and protection of the child's interests	Interaction with prosecutors and relevant assistance mechanisms during proceedings	Child-sensitive and trauma-informed considerations require consistent application
DP3A/P2TP2A officers	Case assistance, referral, psychosocial support, and service coordination	Victim-centered and multidisciplinary protection	Link between law enforcement, psychologists, social services, and families	Coordination and service continuity may be constrained by institutional capacity
Psychologists	Psychological assessment, counseling, trauma management, and recovery support	Trauma-informed and psychosocial recovery	Collaboration with assistance institutions, families, and law enforcement	Availability and continuity of psychological services may be limited
Victim advocates	Legal assistance, advocacy, accompaniment, and protection of victims' rights	Rights-based and victim-centered protection	Facilitation between victims/families and legal or support institutions	Effectiveness depends on institutional access and coordination

Cross-stakeholder perspectives also highlighted the need for legal and psychosocial functions to operate as a system, rather than as separate institutional responsibilities, to provide effective protection. While law enforcement processes are important for legal accountability, psychologists and victim-assistance institutions contribute to emotional safety, trauma recovery and victims' ability to participate in legal proceedings (Hung, 2026). Previous studies in Indonesia also demonstrate that fragmented services, limited professional capacity and poor coordination can weaken child-centered responses to sexual violence (Henry et al., 2020). Inter-agency coordination should be more than simply referring cases, it should mean shared responsibility for the victim's safety, participation, confidentiality and recovery throughout the justice process.

Effective child protection in Aceh needs a multidisciplinary and coordinated approach that combines criminal accountability with psychological recovery, legal assistance and social support in its distinctive socio-legal context (Jeumpa et al., 2026). Thus, there is a need to strengthen inter-agency coordination, gender-responsive and trauma-informed capacity and continuity of psychosocial services to bridge procedural justice and victim-centered protection. These results provide evidence that effective protection requires the integration of legal, institutional and psychosocial functions, underpinned by normative principles of justice, dignity and protection from harm (Wenham et al., 2020)**.**

4.5. Strategies for Strengthening Gender-Responsive and Trauma-Informed Protection

As seen in Table 6, participants emphasized the necessity of strengthening child protection through gender-sensitive professional capacity, child-appropriate legal procedures, trauma-sensitive psychological services, cross-agency coordination, and continued victim recovery. Particular attention was paid to examination procedures, as repeated or intimidating questioning can increase fear and psychological distress. As one participant noted, "Child victims need examination processes that make them feel safe, not intimidated or retraumatized during questioning" (I-04). These findings suggest that effective protection is not only about procedural compliance, but also that legal processes should be designed to protect the child's dignity, psychological safety and ability to participate, without secondary victimization.

Table 6.
Strategies for Strengthening Gender-Responsive and Trauma-Informed Protection for Child Victims of Sexual Violence.

Strategic Area	**Identified Need**	**Proposed Strengthening Strategy**	**Expected Protection Outcome**
Gender-responsive professional capacity	Gender sensitivity and understanding of victims' specific vulnerabilities were not consistently integrated into practice	Regular gender-responsive and child-protection training for law enforcement and victim-assistance professionals	Reduced gender bias, victim-blaming, and secondary victimization
Child-friendly legal procedures	Formal examination procedures could generate fear and psychological distress	Strengthen child-friendly interviewing, safe examination environments, and procedures that minimize repetitive or intimidating questioning	Greater psychological safety and meaningful participation in legal proceedings
Trauma-informed psychological services	Trauma, fear, and emotional distress may continue throughout legal proceedings	Integrate psychological assessment, counseling, trauma-informed assistance, and continuity of care throughout the justice process	Psychological recovery and reduced risk of retraumatization
Inter-agency coordination	Legal, psychological, and social services	Strengthen referral mechanisms,	More continuous and integrated legal–

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	were not always fully integrated	communication, case coordination, and shared responsibilities among relevant institutions	psychosocial protection
Victim recovery and social reintegration	Protection may focus on legal proceedings without sufficient attention to long-term recovery	Strengthen rehabilitation, family support, psychosocial recovery, and safe social reintegration	Sustainable recovery and restoration of victims' wellbeing
Victim-centered restorative approach	Recovery needs may extend beyond formal legal outcomes	Where legally appropriate, apply restorative principles to support psychological restoration, victim recovery, and social reintegration without replacing criminal accountability	Recovery-oriented justice while maintaining legal protection and accountability

The proposed strategies also demonstrate the mutually reinforcing nature of gender-responsive and trauma-informed approaches. Gender-sensitive practice requires an awareness of gender-specific stigma, unequal power relations and victim-blaming; trauma-sensitive practice requires an awareness of how traumatic experiences may affect disclosure, memory, communication and participation in legal proceedings. Professional training should therefore be supported by child-friendly interviewing, psychological assistance, appropriate referral mechanisms and continuity of care. This is consistent with previous studies indicating the necessity of combining legal assistance and psychosocial support for the protection of child victims during the justice process (Rofiqoh et al., 2026).

Participants stressed the need for better coordination between law enforcement, DP3A/P2TP2A, psychologists and victim advocates to ensure continuity of protection from reporting and investigation through recovery and social reintegration. In Aceh, this integrated approach should combine criminal accountability with gender-responsive, trauma-informed and culturally sensitive services, and distinguish Islamic principles of justice, dignity and protection from damaging patriarchal or stigmatizing practices (Setyawati et al.). Restorative principles, to the extent allowed by law, can complement formal justice through a focus on victim-centered recovery, psychological restoration and social reintegration, but should never replace criminal accountability.

4.6. Integrated Socio-Legal Model of Child Victim Protection in Aceh

Building on the integrated findings across the five themes, Figure 2 presents a socio-legal model of how formal criminal law, Islamic normative values, customary norms, gender relations, family and community contexts and institutional capacity influence child protection in Aceh. These interconnected factors shape the experience of victims through the reporting, investigation, legal proceedings and recovery. Therefore, an integrated gender responsive, trauma informed and child-centred approach that links criminal accountability to psychosocial support and inter-agency coordination is necessary for effective protection.

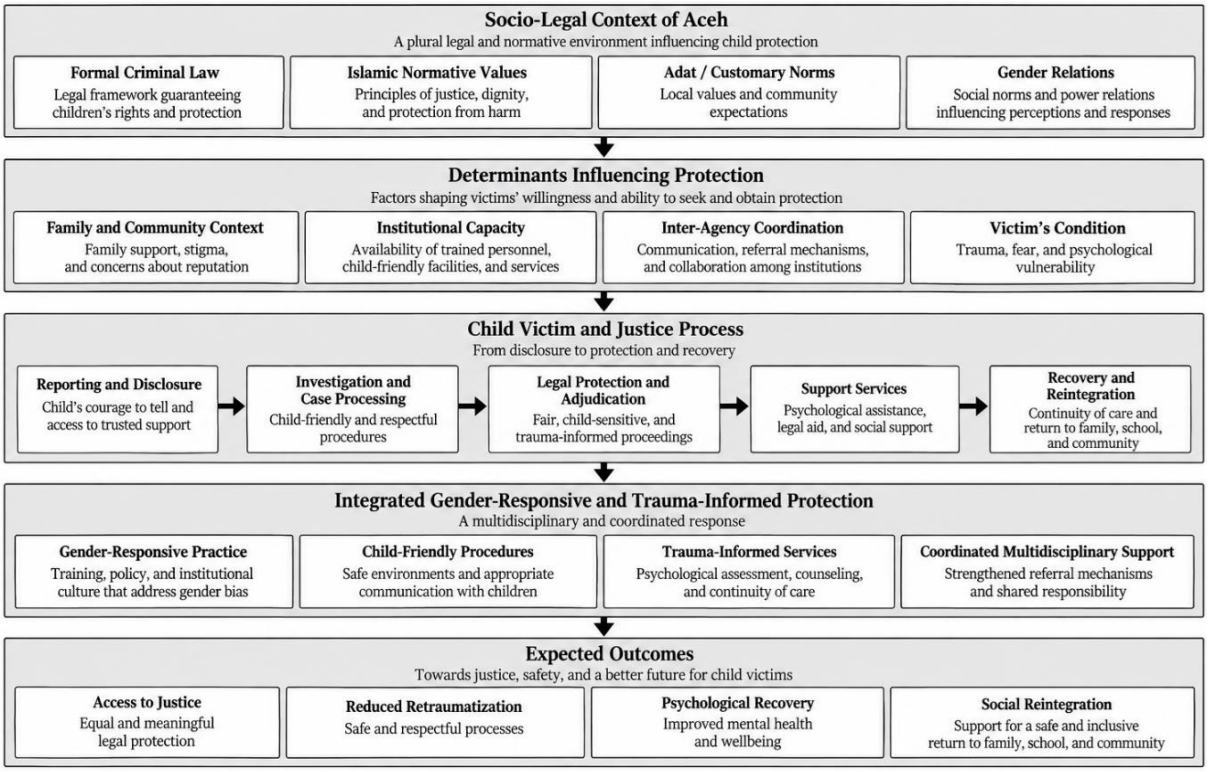


Figure 2. Integrated socio-legal model of gender-responsive and trauma-informed protection for child victims of sexual violence in Aceh.

5. CONCLUSION

To summarize, this study shows that the legal protection of child victims of sexual violence in Aceh has not yet fully implemented gender-responsive and trauma-informed approaches. The interplay of formal criminal law, institutional practices, Islamic normative values, customary norms, gender relations, and family and community contexts impact victims' reporting, participation in legal proceedings, access to protection and psychosocial recovery. The contribution of this study to Aceh-specific child protection lies in demonstrating that effective child protection requires the treatment of these socio-legal dimensions as an interconnected system, while distinguishing the Islamic principles of justice, dignity and protection from harm from patriarchal and stigmatizing practices that may constrain victim protection.

These findings support an integrated, gender-responsive, trauma-informed, child-centered protection model that combines criminal accountability with child-friendly procedures, psychological assistance, victim advocacy, and coordinated multidisciplinary services. Therefore, improving professional capacity and inter-agency coordination is essential to reduce the risk of re-traumatization and ensure continued protection from disclosure and investigation through to recovery and social reintegration. Future research should assess the implementation and effectiveness of this integrated socio-legal model across different settings in Aceh, and culturally responsive strategies for enhancing access to justice and long-term recovery of child victims.

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