

Disclose the Response, Protect the Person: Managing Information Transparency and Victim Privacy in Campus Sexual Violence Crises in Indonesian Higher Education

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Purpose: Universities facing sexual violence cases must answer public demands for transparency while protecting victims' identities and the integrity of investigations. This study examines how Indonesian universities manage information disclosure and privacy protection when such cases become institutional crises.

Design/Methodology/Approach: A qualitative case study drew on in-depth interviews with members of Sexual Violence Prevention and Handling Task Forces (Satgas PPKS), public relations (PR) officers and university leaders, together with observation and analysis of policies, press releases and institutional social media. Data were analysed thematically.

Findings: Universities practised a selective form of transparency: they disclosed institutional actions, procedures and commitments while withholding victim identities, testimonies and investigative details. Privacy was protected through identity confidentiality, restricted information flows during investigation, need-to-know access with confidentiality pledges, and coordination between the task force and PR. Virality on social media weakened institutional control over information and sharpened the trade-off between speed and verification. Two coordination patterns emerged: PR-led communication with task force support, and task force-led communication with PR oversight.

Originality/Value

The study reframes the transparency, privacy relationship as a matter of information governance rather than a zero-sum choice. It proposes a layered disclosure model that separates *process transparency* from *case confidentiality* and assigns disclosure

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terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>). decisions to clearly bounded roles, extending crisis communication theory to victim-centred crises in higher education.

Keywords: crisis communication; information transparency; privacy; campus sexual violence; higher education; public relations; Indonesia.

1. Introduction

Sexual violence in higher education is a persistent, global problem that harms victims and tests the integrity of the institutions meant to protect them (Bondestam & Lundqvist, 2020; Phipps, 2020). When a case becomes public, it often turns into an institutional crisis. Media coverage, student activism and social media circulation create pressure for rapid explanation, while the institution's handling of the case becomes as visible as the original harm (Madden & Alt, 2021; Setianingrum & Pramana, 2026).

Crisis communication research has long advised organisations to respond quickly, openly and consistently (Coombs, 2007; Seeger, 2006). Proactive disclosure can limit reputational damage and reduce the space for rumour (Arpan & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2005; Claeys & Cauberghe, 2012). Sexual violence crises, however, complicate this advice. The information the public most wants, who was involved, what happened and what the investigation found is often the information whose release would expose victims to stigma, intimidation and secondary victimisation (Campbell & Raja, 1999; Ahrens, 2006). Disclosure decisions taken to protect the institution can also become a form of institutional betrayal when they ignore victims' interests (Smith & Freyd, 2014; Dufour, 2024).

Indonesia offers a sharp setting for this tension. Law No. 14 of 2008 on Public Information Disclosure obliges public universities, as public bodies, to provide information to citizens. At the same time, Law No. 12 of 2022 on Sexual Violence Crimes and Law No. 27 of 2022 on Personal Data Protection require the confidentiality of victims' identities and personal data. Ministerial Regulation No. 30 of 2021 required universities to establish Sexual Violence

Prevention and Handling Task Forces (*Satuan Tugas Pencegahan dan Penanganan Kekerasan Seksual*, Satgas PPKS); it was replaced by Ministerial Regulation No. 55 of 2024, which broadened the mandate to violence in general. Studies of Indonesian campuses report uneven implementation, limited transparency and a recurring tendency to place institutional reputation (*nama baik*) ahead of survivors (Adiyanto, 2023; Nursyifa et al., 2026; Rodliyah & Sariroh, 2026).

Existing research on university responses has focused mainly on prevention policy, reporting barriers and image repair (Fortunato, 2008; Mudzakkir et al., 2024; Sabina & Ho, 2014). Our earlier work examined how voice, legitimacy and reputation shape university responses in Indonesia (Setianingrum & Pramana, 2026). Less is known about the operational question that sits beneath every public statement: how institutions decide what to disclose, what to withhold, who may speak and how these decisions protect the person at the centre of the case.

This study addresses that gap. It asks: **How do Indonesian universities manage information transparency and privacy protection when handling sexual violence crises?** Three sub-questions guide the analysis: (1) what information universities disclose and through which channels; (2) how they protect victim privacy inside and outside the institution; and (3) how PR units and task forces divide and coordinate disclosure responsibilities. The study contributes a layered disclosure model that treats transparency and privacy as complementary principles of information governance.

2. Literature review

2.1 Crisis communication and the demand for disclosure

Situational Crisis Communication Theory holds that stakeholders attribute responsibility for a crisis and that response strategies should match that attribution (Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 2002). Image repair theory catalogues the strategies organisations use to defend their reputation, from denial to corrective action (Benoit, 1997). Both traditions share a normative core: inform quickly, accurately and consistently, and show concern for those affected (Seeger, 2006). Ulmer (2001) adds that responses succeed when grounded in established stakeholder relationships, and dialogic approaches stress two-way engagement over one-way messaging (Kent & Taylor, 2002).

Timing matters. "Stealing thunder" by disclosing first can reduce perceived crisis severity (Arpan & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2005), and timing can be as consequential as message content (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2012). Social media has intensified these dynamics. Publics now seek and share crisis information through multiple channels, and the source and form of information shape their responses (Austin et al., 2012; Jin et al., 2014). Crises unfold in multiple issue arenas where organisations are only one voice among many (Frandsen & Johansen, 2017; Luoma-aho & Vos, 2010).

University sexual misconduct crises have been studied mainly through the lens of reputation. Fortunato (2008) analysed Duke University's reputation repair after the lacrosse case; Madden and Alt (2021) argued that the Michigan State/Nassar case required an ethics of care rather than a "bad apple" framing. In Indonesia, Setianingrum and Pramana (2026) found that dialogic engagement preserved legitimacy, whereas reactive or procedural silence intensified moral contestation. These studies show that reputation-centred strategies can backfire, but they say less about how institutions decide the limits of disclosure.

2.2 Transparency as a managed practice

Transparency is commonly defined as the deliberate provision of information that is relevant, accurate and useful to stakeholders, combined with participation and accountability (Rawlins, 2009). In government communication, transparency depends on organisational culture, policy and resources, not only on intent (Fairbanks et al., 2007). Critical scholarship warns that transparency is never total: organisations select, frame and stage what becomes visible (Albu & Flyverbom, 2019; Christensen & Cheney, 2015). This view is useful here. If transparency is always selective, the relevant question is not whether to disclose but which information is disclosed, to whom, when and on what grounds.

2.3 Privacy, confidentiality and victim-centred handling

Communication Privacy Management theory treats private information as co-owned once shared: recipients become co-owners bound by privacy rules, and boundary turbulence follows when those rules are breached (Petronio, 2002). Contextual integrity frames privacy as the appropriateness of information flows within a given context (Nissenbaum, 2004). Both lenses fit the handling of sexual violence reports. A victim who discloses to a task force shares information under specific expectations of confidentiality.

Breaches carry real costs. Negative social reactions silence survivors (Ahrens, 2006), contact with institutional systems can produce secondary victimisation (Campbell & Raja, 1999), and institutional failure to prevent or respond supportively compounds trauma (Smith & Freyd, 2013, 2014). Many students do not report because they fear loss of control over their information or doubt that institutions will protect them (Fisher et al., 2003; Holland & Cortina, 2017; Spencer et al., 2017). Policies that compel disclosure without survivor consent can undermine trust (Holland et al., 2018), and students' experiences with formal reporting offices are mixed (Webermann et al., 2024). Ecological reviews locate institutional betrayal

across policies, structures and communication practices (Dufour, 2024; Moylan & Javorka, 2020).

2.4 Social media, virality and public pressure

Digital feminist activism, including #MeToo, has made social media a central arena for naming sexual violence and pressuring institutions (Mendes et al., 2018). Virality can bring hidden cases to light but also spreads unverified claims and identifying details beyond any institution's control. Ethical PR practice on social media therefore requires attention to harm, not only to reach and speed (Berg, 2017).

2.5 The Indonesian regulatory and institutional context

Indonesian universities operate under overlapping obligations. Law No. 14 of 2008 mandates public information disclosure but exempts information whose release would harm personal privacy. Law No. 12 of 2022 guarantees victims' rights to confidentiality, and Law No. 27 of 2022 governs personal data. Ministerial Regulation No. 30 of 2021 established Satgas PPKS units; Ministerial Regulation No. 55 of 2024 now governs violence prevention and handling in higher education. Recent studies show that Indonesian campuses have adopted regulations, standard operating procedures and task forces, yet face weak case monitoring, limited transparency, stigma and resource constraints (Mudzakkir et al., 2024; Nursyifa et al., 2026; Rodliyah & Sariroh, 2026). Public clarifications by alleged perpetrators and officials have sometimes relied on denial and victim-blaming (Adiyanto, 2023).

Taken together, the literature treats transparency and privacy largely in separate streams. Crisis communication research asks how much to disclose for reputation's sake; victim-centred research asks how to keep survivors' information safe. This study brings the two streams together at the level of everyday institutional information management.

3. Method

3.1 Research design

The study used a qualitative case study design, suited to examining a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context where boundaries between phenomenon and context are blurred (Yin, 2018). The case is the management of information disclosure and privacy during sexual violence crises in Indonesian public universities. The design was descriptive and exploratory, integrating data from two collection stages so that each stage informed and corroborated the other.

3.2 Research sites and participants

The study covered Indonesian public universities. Sites were selected purposively because each had (a) handled at least one sexual violence case that drew public or media attention, (b) an operating Satgas PPKS, and (c) a PR unit involved in the institutional response.

Participants were informants: Satgas PPKS members, PR officers or official spokespersons, university leaders, and others (e.g., legal unit staff). They were selected for their direct involvement in case handling or institutional communication. Survivors were not interviewed, to avoid re-traumatisation; their perspective enters the analysis through task force accounts and documents.

3.3 Data collection

Three sources were used. First, semi-structured in-depth interviews explored what information was released, who decided, how confidentiality was maintained and how media and social media pressure was handled. Second, observation of task force coordination meetings, socialisation events, official channels. Third, document analysis of institutional regulations, standard operating procedures, press releases, official statements and institutional social media posts about the cases, alongside news coverage. [Number] documents were analysed.

3.4 Data analysis

Interview transcripts and documents were analysed thematically following Braun and

Clarke (2006): familiarisation, initial coding, theme construction, review, definition and reporting. Initial codes were organised around four sensitising concepts drawn from the literature: disclosure, privacy protection, the transparency privacy dilemma and role coordination. Themes were compared across sites to identify common practices and variations.

3.5 Trustworthiness and ethics

Credibility was strengthened through source triangulation (interviews, observation, documents) (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The study received ethical approval. All informants gave informed consent. Universities, informants and cases are reported without identifying details, and no information that could identify any victim, reporter, witness or alleged perpetrator is presented.

4. Findings

The analysis produced four themes: selective transparency about institutional action; layered

privacy protection; the transparency–privacy dilemma under viral pressure; and differentiated roles of PR and the task force. [Each theme with 1–2 verbatim, anonymised interview excerpts, coded by role and site (e.g., "TF-A2" for a task force member at University A). The research report contains no direct quotations, so these must come from the transcripts.]

4.1 Selective transparency: disclosing the response, not the case

Universities did not equate transparency with releasing everything known about a case. Informants consistently separated institutional information, which could be shared, from personal and investigative information, which could not (Table 1). Public statements focused on the existence of reporting mechanisms, the task force's role, the institution's commitment to follow up, the stage of handling in general terms, and prevention measures. Aggregate data, numbers of reports, stages of handling and outcomes were identified as a form of accountability that reveals no individual details.

Table 1. Information categories in sexual violence crisis communication

Category	Examples from the data	Disclosure practice	Audience
Institutional policy and procedure	Regulations, SOPs, reporting channels, task force existence	Open, proactive	Campus community, public
Institutional action	Report received, handling under way, protective steps taken, sanctions once final	Open after verification	Public, media
Aggregate accountability data	Number of reports, stages, outcomes	Open, periodic	Public
Case progress	Stage of examination, next steps	Restricted to direct parties	Victim/reporter
Investigative material	Chronology, testimonies, witness statements	Closed during handling	Need-to-know only
Identifying information	Names, personal data, details that enable identification	Closed	Need-to-know only

Universities used several channels: official websites and internal portals for policies and reporting procedures; social media for rapid clarification; press releases and press

conferences for formal statements; and direct forums with the campus community. Informants noted that internal media reached students directly, while social media and mass

media became decisive once a case drew public attention. The main obstacles were the pressure to respond quickly before facts were verified, inconsistent messages across channels, and the gap between information being available and being accessible. Some students still struggled to find reporting procedures, and victims did not always receive clear updates on their own cases.

4.2 Layered privacy protection

Privacy protection operated at four levels.

1. **Identity confidentiality.** Task forces kept victims' identities, personal data and statements confidential. Summonses and interviews of victims, witnesses and reported parties were conducted privately, and victims were given explicit assurances of confidentiality to build trust and prevent intimidation.
2. **Restricted flows during investigation.** Chronologies, testimonies and the progress of examination were not released. Information went only to parties with a direct role in handling the case. PR did not publish details still under examination, to avoid releasing unverified claims and to protect the process.
3. **Need-to-know access.** Task force members were bound by confidentiality commitments, and information was not circulated across the wider organisation. Victims were told who would see their information. The data, however, did not show standardised technical safeguards such as access logs, audits or secure document storage protocols; protection relied mainly on personal commitment.
4. **Coordination before public release.** Task forces held substantive knowledge of cases, and PR held responsibility for public messaging. Information passed from one to the other only after selection and verification, so that public statements neither contradicted the handling process nor exposed protected details.

4.3 The dilemma under viral pressure

The tension between transparency and privacy peaked when cases went viral. In one case, a

chronology and a photograph of the alleged perpetrator circulated on social media and reached national media before the victim had reported directly to the task force. External parties then requested information and clarification. Control over information flows shifted away from the institution.

Five pressures defined the dilemma. The public demanded to know whether the institution was acting. Victims needed confidentiality to remain safe. The institution needed to clarify its position. Public interest and individual protection pulled in different directions. And institutions had to devise strategies under time pressure. Informants described a double risk: statements that were too general were dismissed as evasive and left room for speculation, while statements that were too detailed risked identifying the victim through a combination of facts, even without naming anyone.

Universities responded by focusing statements on verified institutional action, appointing an official spokesperson for single-door communication, issuing press releases, using official social media to correct rumours, and monitoring online conversation. They also tried to explain why some information could not yet be released, rather than simply declining to comment.

4.4 Differentiated roles of PR and the task force

Two coordination patterns emerged. In the first, **PR-led communication**, PR managed messaging across platforms and accompanied university leaders and task force members at press statements. The task force supplied technical information about handling, while PR shaped the narrative and ensured consistency with institutional policy. In the second, **task force-led communication**, a task force with experience of high-profile cases and growing institutional trust drafted press releases and managed its own social media accounts, while still coordinating with PR, the legal unit and leadership.

In both patterns, the task force held what we term *substantive legitimacy* (direct knowledge of the

case) and PR held *communicative legitimacy* (competence in public messaging). Coordination extended to legal, health and psychological services, and sometimes to external agencies. Informants also described empathic, victim-oriented communication: listening carefully, explaining each stage of the process, involving counselling services and avoiding victim-blaming language in public statements. Where roles or approval procedures were unclear, responses slowed; where coordination was absent, statements diverged.

5. Discussion

5.1 From a trade-off to information governance

The findings challenge the common framing of transparency and privacy as opposing values. The universities studied did not choose between them; they sorted information into categories and applied different rules to each. This matches the critical view that transparency is always selective and managed (Albu & Flyverbom, 2019; Christensen & Cheney, 2015), but it gives

that selectivity a normative anchor. Here, selection was justified not by reputation but by the victim's rights and the integrity of the process. Read through Communication Privacy Management theory, the task force becomes a co-owner of the victim's information, bound by privacy rules that it must also negotiate with PR and leadership (Petronio, 2002). Disclosure decisions are therefore boundary decisions, and viral circulation is a form of boundary turbulence that the institution did not cause but must still manage.

We propose a **layered disclosure model** (Figure 1) that distinguishes *process transparency*, openness about policies, actions, stages and aggregate outcomes from *case confidentiality*, protection of identities, testimonies and investigative material. The two layers are connected by a verification gate managed jointly by the task force and PR. The model is consistent with contextual integrity (Nissenbaum, 2004): the same fact may flow appropriately to a victim or an investigator and inappropriately to the press.

Process is disclosed, the case stays confidential

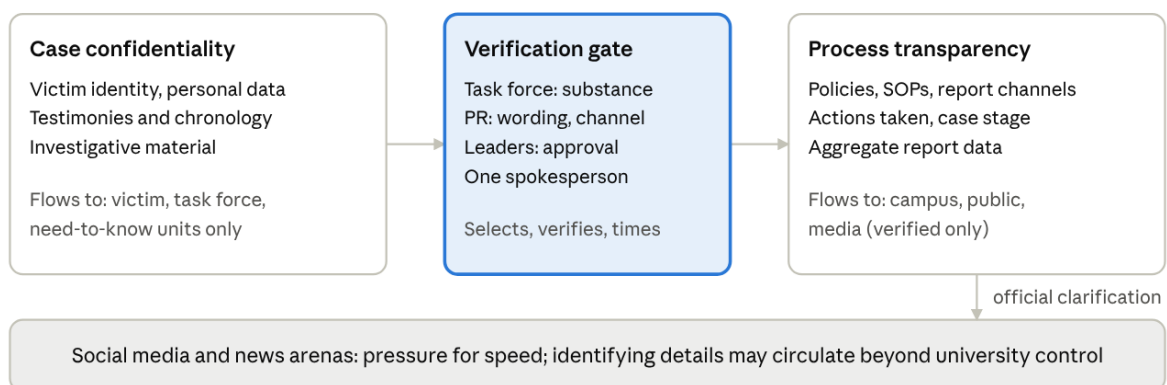


Figure 1. Layered disclosure model for campus sexual violence crises

Figure 1. Information moves from the confidential layer to the public layer only through a joint verification gate; the victim's own case updates stay inside the confidential layer.

5.2 Speed, verification and the limits of "stealing thunder"

Crisis communication research rewards early disclosure (Arpan & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2005; Claeys & Cauberghe, 2012). Our findings qualify this advice. In sexual violence crises, early disclosure of process is valuable, but early disclosure of case details is harmful. Universities

that explained what they were doing, and why they could not yet say more, avoided both the evasive silence that fuels speculation and the oversharing that exposes victims. This aligns with Setianingrum and Pramana's (2026) observation that procedural silence intensified scrutiny, and with Madden and Alt's (2021) call for an ethics of care. Virality further shows that institutions act in multiple arenas they do not control (Frandsen & Johansen, 2017; Luoma-aho & Vos, 2010). The realistic goal is not to control the narrative but to be a reliable source that does not add identifying information.

5.3 Two kinds of legitimacy

The distinction between substantive legitimacy (task force) and communicative legitimacy (PR) explains why neither unit can manage disclosure alone. A PR unit without substantive input risks empty or inaccurate statements; a task force without communication support risks inconsistent messaging. The task force-led pattern suggests that communicative authority can grow with experience and trust, enabling faster responses. Both patterns, however, depend on explicit boundaries of authority and approval routes, which were not always formalised.

5.4 Privacy beyond personal commitment

Privacy protection rested heavily on individual pledges and informal norms. Survivors' reluctance to report is closely tied to fears about who will know (Fisher et al., 2003; Holland & Cortina, 2017; Spencer et al., 2017), and institutional lapses can amount to institutional betrayal (Smith & Freyd, 2013; Dufour, 2024). Without procedural safeguards documented access rights, secure storage and audit trails, as Law No. 27 of 2022 implies, protection depends on the conduct of a few individuals. Strengthening these safeguards is as much a crisis communication task as drafting statements, because a single leak can turn a handled case into a public crisis.

5.5 Victim-centred rather than reputation-centred communication

Finally, the findings support a shift from reputation-centred to victim-centred crisis communication. Image repair strategies such as denial or minimisation are ill-suited when the institution's primary obligation is to a person it must protect (Adiyanto, 2023; Benoit, 1997). Empathic language, explanations of process and regular updates to the victim are not peripheral courtesies; they are the conditions under which survivors trust the institution enough to report (Ahrens, 2006; Holland et al., 2018). Reputation is better treated as a consequence of responsible handling than as its objective.

6. Conclusion

Indonesian universities handling sexual violence crises practised selective transparency: open about policies, actions and outcomes, closed about identities, testimonies and investigative material. Privacy was protected through confidentiality of identity, restricted flows during investigation, need-to-know access and coordination between the task force and PR. Virality on social media intensified the dilemma by moving information beyond institutional control and forcing trade-offs between speed and verification. Transparency and privacy proved compatible when managed as distinct layers of information governance, connected by a shared verification step and clear roles.

6.1 Theoretical implications

The study extends crisis communication theory to victim-centred crises, where the main stakeholder to protect is an individual rather than the organisation's reputation. It links crisis communication with privacy theory (Petronio, 2002; Nissenbaum, 2004) and with research on institutional betrayal (Smith & Freyd, 2014). The layered disclosure model and the distinction between substantive and communicative legitimacy offer concepts for future comparative work.

6.2 Practical implications

- **University leaders** should adopt a crisis communication protocol for sexual violence cases that defines the authority of the task force, PR, legal unit and leadership, including verification and approval routes, and that prioritises victims' safety over reputation.
- **PR units** should prepare holding statements that describe process without case detail, apply single-door communication without using it to avoid questions, and monitor social media continuously.
- **Task forces** should formalise information governance, documented access rights, secure storage of physical and digital files and confidentiality protocols and give victims regular updates on their own cases.
- **Regulators** could issue guidance under Ministerial Regulation No. 55 of 2024 specifying which categories of case information may be disclosed, consistent

with Laws No. 14 of 2008, No. 12 of 2022 and No. 27 of 2022.

6.3 Limitations and future research

The study relied on institutional informants and documents; survivors' own assessments of disclosure practices were not collected. The number of sites is small and limited to public universities, so the findings are analytically, not statistically, generalisable. Future research could include survivors through trauma-informed designs, compare public and private institutions, and test the layered disclosure model through content analysis of institutional statements across cases.

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Ethics. Informed consent was obtained from all informants.

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