

Whose testimony is believed? linguistic credibility, gendered narratives, and institutional power in Indonesian sexual violence judgments

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ABSTRACT

Background: Sexual violence adjudication in Indonesia increasingly depends not only on legal proof, but also on how courts linguistically construct whose testimony becomes believable, doubtful, admissible, or insufficient. **Objective:** This study examines how linguistic credibility, gendered narrative positioning, and institutional power are textualised in Indonesian sexual violence judgments. **Method:** Using a qualitative legal discourse design, this study analyses 11 judgment-related text units drawn from a public corpus of court judgments and judgment-linked legal documents, combining forensic linguistic analysis, feminist legal theory, and critical discourse analysis. **Results:** The findings show that credibility is produced through judicial revoicing, evidentiary sequencing, corroborative uptake, procedural framing, and legal thresholding. Victim testimony is often made persuasive when attached to recognised signs of vulnerability, medical or psychological corroboration, object evidence, or institutional validation, while disbelief is expressed through explicit judicial formulations of doubt and insufficiency. **Implication:** Institutional power operates by ranking victim testimony, defendant denial, witness statements, expert reports, documentary proof, and statutory elements within a hierarchy of legal intelligibility. **Novelty:** This study contributes a discourse-based account of testimonial belief in Indonesian sexual violence adjudication by shifting attention from whether testimony is accepted to how credibility is linguistically and institutionally made possible.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Sexual violence in Indonesia has become a legal problem of credibility as much as a problem of reporting, protection, and punishment. Komnas Perempuan recorded 376,529 cases of gender-based violence against women in 2025, a 14.07 per cent increase from the previous year; KemenPPPA also reported that the prevalence of sexual violence against women stood at 5.3 per cent in 2024. These figures do not simply describe exposure to harm; they show how many experiences must pass through institutional filters before they can become legally intelligible. Since the enactment of Law No. 12 of 2022 on Sexual Violence Crimes and the continued relevance of Supreme Court Regulation No. 3 of 2017 on women before the law, Indonesian courts have been formally positioned as spaces where victim-centred protection and evidentiary judgment must be reconciled. The crucial question is therefore not only whether sexual violence is prosecuted, but whose testimony is made believable within judicial language.

Recent scholarship has shown that credibility in sexual violence cases is shaped by more than factual accuracy. Studies on testimony assessment examine narrative completeness, consistency, demeanour, child-victim reliability, and professional evaluation in sexual abuse proceedings [1], [2], [3]. Feminist legal and socio-legal research has further shown that victim-witnesses often face a double bind: they must appear harmed but not unstable, coherent but not rehearsed, vulnerable but not morally suspect [4], [5], [6]. Work on epistemic injustice and “perfect victim” reasoning explains why some speakers are institutionally believed while others are discounted [7], [8], [9]. Indonesian studies have addressed sexual violence law, evidence, media representation, and gendered discourse [10], [11], [12], yet the linguistic mechanisms through which Indonesian judgments construct testimonial credibility remain insufficiently examined.

This study addresses that gap by analysing how Indonesian sexual violence judgments linguistically organise credibility, gendered narrative, and institutional authority. It asks three connected questions. First, how are the testimonies of victims, defendants, and other witnesses reported, summarised, and evaluated in judicial texts? Second, what linguistic markers—such as modality, evidential verbs, attribution, narrative sequencing, evaluative adjectives, and formulations of consistency or contradiction—are used to make testimony appear reliable, doubtful, incomplete, or legally decisive? Third, how do judicial texts distribute authority among victim accounts, defendant denials, witness statements, expert evidence, documentary proof, and legal doctrine? These questions position judgment-writing not as a neutral container of legal reasoning, but as a textual practice in which institutional power translates lived experience into evidentiary form. Methodologically, this study combines forensic linguistic attention to wording, critical discourse analysis of power, and feminist legal concern with gendered credibility expectations.

This study advances the argument that testimonial credibility in sexual violence judgments should be understood as a discursive accomplishment rather than a merely technical evidentiary label. The working proposition is that judicial language may produce hierarchies of belief by privileging certain forms of narration—linear chronology, emotional restraint, corroborated consistency, legal recognisability—while rendering other forms of disclosure more vulnerable to doubt. This does not presume that judges intentionally reproduce gender bias or that language alone determines verdicts. Rather, this study tests how credibility is textualised through recurrent linguistic choices within institutional reasoning. Its broader implication is that access to justice depends not only on legal reform, but also on the interpretive grammar through which courts hear, revoice, and evaluate testimony. By linking linguistic credibility, gendered narratives, and institutional power, this study contributes to legal discourse research, feminist jurisprudence, and Indonesian socio-legal scholarship without collapsing textual analysis into causal claims about judicial outcomes.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Linguistic credibility in sexual violence

Credibility in sexual violence adjudication is not a self-evident property of testimony, but a legal and linguistic judgment produced through institutional interpretation. Psychological and legal studies often define credibility through consistency, plausibility, narrative completeness, and perceived reliability [13], [14], [3]. Socio-legal and feminist scholarship, however, challenges this technical view by showing that credibility is also shaped by expectations about memory, emotion, trauma, and normative victimhood [4], [5]. Bublit (2023) [7] further reframes disbelief as a possible form of epistemic injustice when legal procedure deforms the speaker as a knowing subject.

Credibility assessment is therefore best approached through several linguistic indicators rather than as a single evidentiary label. First, courts may rely on narrative coherence, sequencing, and completeness, especially in sexual abuse cases involving children or vulnerable complainants [2], [1], [15]. Second, credibility may be inferred from demeanour, emotional display, and perceived spontaneity, although such indicators remain contested because they may reproduce misleading assumptions about trauma [16], [17]. Third, forensic linguistic work on Indonesian legal texts indicates that testimony is mediated through reported speech, evidential verbs, and judicial reformulation [18], [19].

2.2. Gendered narratives

Gendered narratives refer to the patterned ways in which victims, defendants, and witnesses are positioned through assumptions about femininity, sexuality, vulnerability, morality, and responsibility. In sexual violence discourse, gender does not merely describe identity; it structures how harm becomes narratable and believable. Studies of victim representation show that courts, media, and public discourse often privilege the “ideal” or “perfect” victim: vulnerable, consistent, morally respectable, and visibly injured [8], [20], [6]. At the same time, feminist analyses of sexual violence narratives show that complainants may be disbelieved when their accounts exceed familiar scripts of innocence, passivity, or normative suffering [21], [22].

The indicators of gendered narrative can be grouped into representational, evaluative, and relational dimensions. Representational indicators concern how victims and defendants are named, described, and narratively foregrounded or backgrounded [11], [23]. Evaluative indicators include lexical choices that imply consent, resistance, shame, morality, vulnerability, or blame [24], [25]. Relational indicators concern how institutional discourse distributes agency between perpetrator action and victim behaviour, a pattern visible in Indonesian media and legal-cultural studies of sexual violence [26], [27]. These indicators help show how gendered credibility is linguistically assembled rather than merely legally assessed.

2.3. Institutional power

Institutional power in judgment-writing refers to the court's authority to transform contested narratives into legally recognised facts. Legal discourse does not only record testimony; it selects, compresses, orders, and authorises it through procedural categories and evidentiary doctrine. Critical legal discourse studies in Indonesia have shown that legal language can reproduce power by appearing neutral while organising social actors into unequal positions of authority [28], [19]. Studies of judicial reasoning similarly show that judges' language constructs justice through interpretive choices, argumentative hierarchy, and institutional voice [29]. In sexual violence cases, this power is intensified because testimony often becomes the central terrain of proof.

The indicators of institutional power include attribution, revoicing, evidentiary hierarchy, and legal uptake. Attribution concerns whether a statement is framed as direct testimony, allegation, denial, corroboration, or inconsistency. Revoicing concerns how victim accounts are rewritten in judicial language, often shifting from lived experience to evidentiary abstraction. Evidentiary hierarchy concerns the relative weight given to victim testimony, defendant denial, witness statements, expert opinion, medical evidence, and documentary proof [10], [30], [12]. This study therefore positions credibility, gendered narrative, and institutional power as mutually constitutive: belief is produced where language, gender, and legal authority converge.

3. METHOD

This study examines judicial language in Indonesian sexual violence judgments through a corpus of public, legally accessible documents. The material object is not testimony as spoken in court, but testimony as reported, reformulated, and evaluated in written judgments and supporting legal documents. The prepared corpus contains 23 metadata records, 14 sanitised text units, and 14 coding rows. The analytic unit is a clause, sentence, or short segment in which victim testimony, defendant denial, witness statement, expert evidence, medical documentation, or judicial reasoning is made relevant to credibility. Table 1 summarises the dataset structure and shows which materials function as primary, secondary, and contextual data.

This study uses a qualitative legal discourse design combining forensic linguistics, critical discourse analysis, and feminist legal analysis. This design is appropriate because credibility in sexual violence judgments is not directly observable as an inner judicial attitude; it becomes analytically accessible through textual practices such as attribution, modality, evidential framing, narrative sequencing, and legal uptake. Forensic linguistic work supports attention to reported speech and evidentiary wording, while critical discourse analysis situates those choices within institutional power. Feminist legal analysis is used to examine whether credibility is organised through gendered expectations of victimhood, vulnerability, morality, consistency, and responsibility.

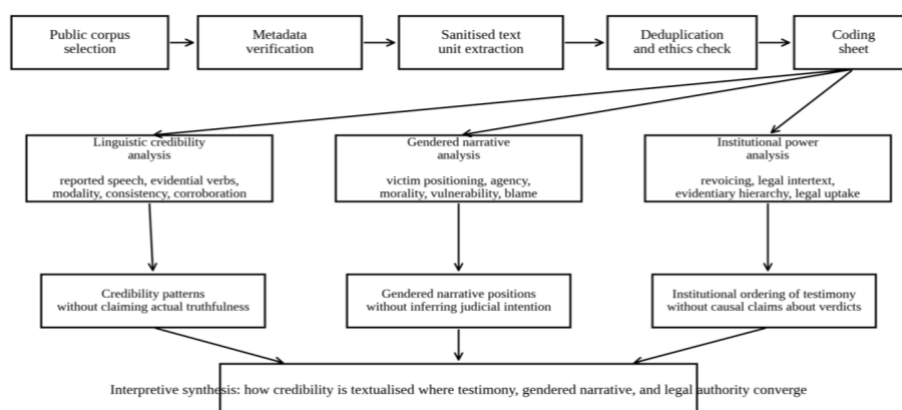


Figure 1. Operational matrix of analysis

Table 1. Composition of dataset

Code	Data Type	Source	Location	Period	Number	Characteristics
PRIM-001– PRIM-006	Primary court judgment copies	Public judgment copies reproduced from or linked to Direktori Putusan MA through academic/civil repositories	Lampung, South Kalimantan, West Nusa Tenggara, Riau, North Sumatra, Bangka Belitung	2015–2022	6	Verified public judgment texts containing testimony, evidentiary reasoning, child-victim testimony, medical evidence, or expert evidence
PRIM-007– PRIM-016	Primary judgment acquisition leads	Public articles, theses, repositories, or legal studies identifying specific judgment numbers	East Nusa Tenggara, North Sumatra, West Kalimantan, Aceh, Banten, East Kalimantan, Central Java	2014–2024	10	Judgment-specific leads for expanding corpus balance across pre- and post-UU TPKS periods
SEC-001	Secondary research report	IJRS decision- indexing report	Indonesia	2018–2020 / online 2024	1	Methodological precedent for using public court decisions and classifying sexual violence judgments
CTX-001	Legal context	UU No. 12 Tahun 2022 on Sexual Violence Crimes	Indonesia	2022	1	Statutory framework for post-2022 sexual violence adjudication
CTX-002	Judicial guideline	PERMA No. 3 Tahun 2017	Indonesia	2017	1	Gender-sensitive adjudication guideline for women before the law
CTX-003	Judicial database context	Direktori Putusan Mahkamah Agung	Indonesia	2007 onward	1	Official public access infrastructure for court decisions
CTX-004– CTX-006	Institution al context	Komnas Perempuan, SIMFONI PPA, LPSK	Indonesia	2024–2026	3	Reporting, protection, and institutional response context for sexual violence and victim-witness protection
TXT-001– TXT-014	Sanitised text units	Extracted from verified judgment texts, secondary report, and legal- context documents	Indonesia	2015–2026	14	Non-explicit excerpts focused on credibility, corroboration, procedural status, and institutional voice
COD-001– COD-014	Coding matrix	Researcher- prepared coding sheet	Indonesia	Corpus- linked	14	Coding fields for credibility markers, gendered narrative positioning, and institutional power

Information was drawn from three source layers. Primary data consist of public Indonesian court judgments or judgment-specific public records linked to sexual violence adjudication. Secondary data consist of a decision-indexing report that supports sampling logic and classification. Contextual data consist of legal and institutional documents, including UU No. 12 Tahun 2022, PERMA No. 3 Tahun 2017, Direktori Putusan MA, Komnas Perempuan, SIMFONI PPA, and LPSK materials. These sources were separated to prevent legal context, institutional statistics, and secondary commentary from being treated as if they were judicial findings produced by this study.

Data collection proceeded in five stages. First, public sources were identified through institutional portals, court-decision repositories, academic repositories, legal articles, and official institutional websites. Second, searches used Indonesian legal keywords such as “saksi korban,” “keterangan korban,” “tidak disumpah,” “visum et repertum,” “kekerasan seksual,” “pencabulan,” “persetubuhan,” “UU TPKS,” and specific judgment numbers. Third, metadata were recorded for source, date, location, legal focus, verification status, access date, and ethical handling. Fourth, duplicates were removed through a normalised

deduplication key. Fifth, text extraction was limited to non-explicit segments relevant to credibility and institutional reasoning.

Data analysis follows an operational matrix organised into three linked procedures. First, linguistic credibility analysis identifies how testimony is made reliable, doubtful, corroborated, inconsistent, or legally usable through wording. Second, gendered narrative analysis examines how victims, defendants, families, vulnerability, morality, agency, and responsibility are positioned. Third, institutional power analysis traces how courts revoice testimony, rank evidentiary materials, invoke legal intertexts, and convert contested accounts into judicial conclusions. Coding remains interpretive rather than statistical: frequency may support pattern recognition, but claims are limited to textual construction and cannot establish actual truthfulness, judicial intention, or causal effects on verdicts.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Linguistic credibility and evidential uptake

Credibility is textualised in these judgment-related units through a movement from voice to evidentiary status. The corpus does not present testimony as a transparent record of what victims, defendants, or witnesses said; it presents testimony after institutional selection, reformulation, and evaluation. This is visible in markers of belief, disbelief, corroboration, procedural status, and evidentiary sequencing. Such markers matter because sexual violence adjudication often depends on how testimonial accounts are made legally persuasive, particularly where harm is mediated through memory, vulnerability, trauma, or limited material evidence. This pattern corresponds with recent work showing that credibility assessment is shaped by narrative completeness, demeanour, corroboration, and professional uptake rather than factual content alone [1], [2], [3].

The most visible pattern is corroborative uptake, especially through medical and psychological evidence, which accounts for four of eleven coded units when psychological, medical, and evidence-ecology markers are grouped together. Judicial credibility conclusions appear in three units, showing both acceptance and rejection of testimony through explicit institutional formulations of belief or doubt. Evidentiary ordering and procedural credibility conditions each appear in two units, indicating that credibility is not only decided by what testimony says, but also by where testimony is placed among witnesses, experts, defendants, documents, objects, oath status, and accompaniment. Objectively, this distribution suggests that testimonial credibility is rarely presented as an isolated judgment; it is commonly embedded in a broader evidentiary architecture.

Theoretically, these patterns support the view that credibility in sexual violence judgments is a discursive accomplishment rather than a purely technical legal label. Testimony becomes believable, doubtful, or legally usable through revoicing, evidential attribution, corroborative alignment, and procedural framing. This finding is consistent with feminist legal scholarship on the burden placed on victim-witnesses to narrate harm in legally recognisable forms [4], [5], [6], while also aligning with epistemic injustice scholarship that treats disbelief as an institutional relation rather than a merely individual response [7], [9]. This study therefore reads credibility as the point where linguistic form, evidentiary hierarchy, and judicial authority converge.

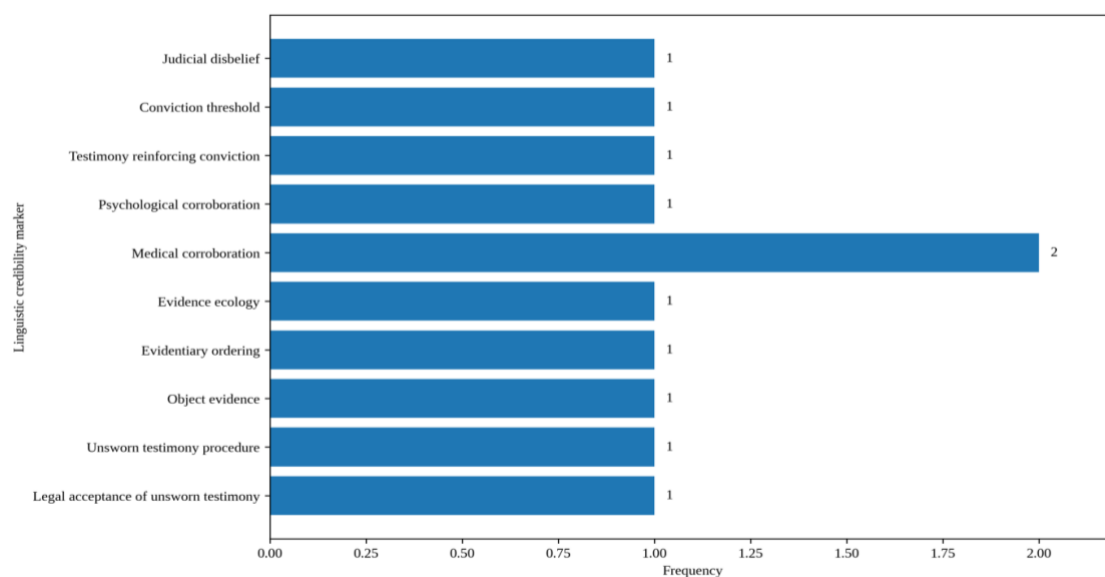


Figure 2. Distribution of linguistic credibility markers

Table 2. Linguistic credibility markers in judgment-related text units

Subcategory	Linguistic Indicator	Evidentiary Function	Frequency	Percentage	Data Variation	Representative Textual Evidence	Data Code
Judicial disbelief	Negative credibility predicate; judicial certainty marker	Converts testimony into an explicit finding of disbelief	1	9.1%	Child victim-witness testimony	“keterangan anak saksi Saksi Korban tidak dapat dipercaya dan diyakini kebenarannya”	TXT-001
Conviction threshold	Absence of judicial conviction; statutory-element framing	Links testimonial doubt to failure of proof	1	9.1%	Defendant culpability and victim testimony	“Majelis Hakim tidak memperoleh keyakinan Terdakwa telah ... melakukan tipu muslihat...”	TXT-002
Testimony reinforcing conviction	Reference to victim testimony as support for judicial belief	Uses testimony to strengthen legal persuasion	1	9.1%	Victim-witness testimony	“merujuk pada keterangan saksi korban untuk memperkuat keyakinan...”	TXT-010
Psychological corroboration	Expert-report reference; evidential attribution	Supports testimony through psychological assessment	1	9.1%	Child victim-witness testimony	“Berdasarkan Hasil Pemeriksaan Psikologis terhadap Saksi Anak ...”	TXT-004
Medical corroboration	Visum et Repertum reference; documentary proof marker	Tests or supports testimony through medical documentation	2	18.2%	Medical evidence and prosecutorial evidence list	“Berdasarkan Visum et Repertum Nomor ...”; “bukti surat berupa Hasil Pemeriksaan Visum ...”	TXT-007; TXT-008
Evidence ecology	Combination of disability status, de auditu testimony, visum, and psychological report	Places vulnerable testimony within a network of supporting evidence	1	9.1%	Victim with disability and supporting witnesses	“keterangan saksi korban penyandang disabilitas ... Visum et Repertum, hasil pemeriksaan psikologis”	TXT-011
Institutional sequencing	Ordered list of witnesses, expert, defendant, documentary and object evidence	Ranks voices and materials as part of legal reasoning	1	9.1%	Witness, expert, defendant, documentary/object evidence	“Setelah mendengar keterangan Saksi-saksi, Ahli dan Terdakwa serta memperhatikan bukti surat dan barang bukti”	TXT-003
Object evidence	Material object reference; inventory phrasing	Positions physical evidence alongside testimonial claims	1	9.1%	Digital/object evidence	“1 (satu) buah HP merek Samsung ...”	TXT-005
Unsworn testimony procedure	Oath-status marker; accompaniment marker	Frames testimony through procedural vulnerability	1	9.1%	Child victim-witness	“Anak Korban, tidak disumpah ... didampingi ibu kandungnya”	TXT-006
Legal acceptance of unsworn testimony	Validity marker; judicial recognition	Authorises unsworn victim testimony as legally usable	1	9.1%	Unsworn child victim testimony	“keterangan saksi korban (yang tidak disumpah) sebagai alat bukti yang sah”	TXT-009
			11	100%			

4.2. Gendered narratives of victimhood, vulnerability, and responsibility

Gendered narrative positioning appears most clearly where judicial texts translate vulnerability into evidentiary form. The dominant issue is not simply whether victims are represented sympathetically, but how their testimony is placed within legal expectations of childhood, bodily injury, procedural status, and corroborative support. This matters because sexual violence judgments often operate within a tension between recognising vulnerability and requiring legally stable proof. Recent feminist and socio-legal studies describe this tension as a credibility burden imposed on victim-witnesses, who are expected to narrate harm in recognisable, coherent, and institutionally acceptable ways [4], [5], [6]. The data therefore show gendered narration as a legal-linguistic process of positioning, not merely as representation.

The dominant pattern is victim vulnerability framing, which appears in four of eleven units or 36.4 per cent. Embodied and material corroboration follows with three units or 27.3 per cent, showing that bodily traces, medical documents, and object evidence frequently anchor testimonial accounts. Institutional mediation appears in two units, while defendant-centred legal thresholding and intersectional vulnerability appear once each. Objectively, this distribution indicates that victim testimony is rarely allowed to stand as an autonomous narrative. It is repeatedly reframed through procedural qualification, expert assessment, medical proof, evidentiary sequencing, or statutory-element reasoning. The pattern is consistent with studies of sexual violence discourse showing that victimhood becomes credible when it fits institutionally recognisable scripts of vulnerability, injury, and corroboration [8], [20], [9].

Theoretically, this pattern suggests that gendered credibility is produced through a double movement: victim vulnerability is acknowledged, but that acknowledgement is often mediated by institutional forms that control how vulnerability may count. This does not imply that every use of corroboration is biased or improper; corroboration is central to legal proof. The critical issue is that gendered testimony becomes persuasive only after being translated into forms that courts can stabilise: medical reports, expert discourse, procedural labels, and judicial revoicing. This reading aligns with feminist legal theory's critique of the "perfect victim" template and with epistemic injustice theory's concern with unequal credibility allocation [7], [21], [22]. This study therefore treats gendered narrative as a structured condition of legal believability.

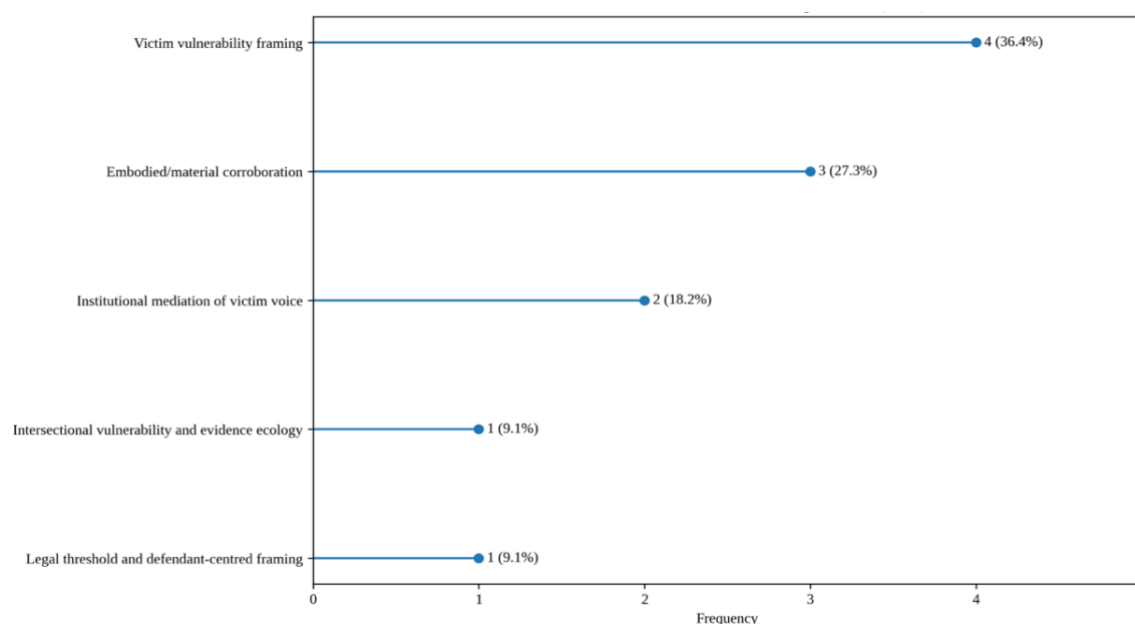


Figure 3. Distribution of gendered narrative positioning (n = 11)

Table 3. Gendered narrative positioning in judgment-related text units

Main Category	Subcategory	Narrative Indicator	Discursive Function	Frequency	Percentage	Data Variation	Representative Textual Evidence	Data Code
Victim vulnerability framing	Child victim as procedurally vulnerable witness	Child status, oath status, accompaniment, and credibility qualification	Frames testimony through vulnerability while subjecting it to institutional testing	4	36.4%	Child victim-witness testimony, psychological assessment, unsworn testimony, procedural accompaniment	“Anak Korban, tidak disumpah ... didampingi ibu kandungnya”; “keterangan saksi korban (yang tidak disumpah) sebagai alat bukti yang sah”	TXT-001; TXT-004; TXT-006; TXT-009
Embodied/material corroboration	Body and object as evidentiary anchors	Visum, medical documentation, object evidence, evidentiary inventory	Moves credibility from narration toward bodily or material trace	3	27.3%	Medical evidence, documentary evidence, digital/object evidence	“Berdasarkan Visum et Repertum Nomor ...”; “1 (satu) buah HP merek Samsung ...”	TXT-005; TXT-007; TXT-008
Institutional mediation of victim voice	Judicial revoicing of victim testimony	Reported speech, sequencing, and judicial uptake	Transforms victim account into legally usable institutional language	2	18.2%	Victim testimony in judicial sequence and conviction reasoning	“merujuk pada keterangan saksi korban untuk memperkuat keyakinan...”	TXT-003; TXT-010
Legal threshold and defendant-centred framing	Defendant culpability as evidentiary filter	Statutory elements, absence of judicial conviction, defendant-oriented legal formulation	Tests victim account against legally recognised elements of culpability	1	9.1%	Defendant culpability and judicial doubt	“Majelis Hakim tidak memperoleh keyakinan Terdakwa telah ... melakukan tipu muslihat...”	TXT-002
Intersectional vulnerability and evidence ecology	Disability and corroborative layering	Disability status, de auditu testimony, medical and psychological support	Places vulnerable testimony within a multi-source evidentiary network	1	9.1%	Victim with disability and supporting evidence	“keterangan saksi korban penyandang disabilitas ... Visum et Repertum, hasil pemeriksaan psikologis”	TXT-011
Total				11	100%			

4.3. Institutional power, legal voice, and testimonial hierarchy

Institutional power appears in these judgment-related units as the authority to revoice testimony, organise evidence, and decide when speech becomes legally consequential. The issue is not simply that courts possess formal power; rather, that this power is exercised textually through sequencing, attribution, corroboration, admissibility, and proof thresholds. Testimony is not reproduced as an autonomous voice. It is inserted into a judicial architecture where witnesses, experts, defendants, documents, objects, and statutory elements occupy different levels of authority. This pattern accords with critical legal discourse scholarship that treats legal language as a mechanism for ordering social actors while presenting that ordering as neutral reasoning [28], [19], [29].

The dominant pattern is documentary and material evidentiary hierarchy, appearing in three of eleven units or 27.3 per cent. Four other categories each appear twice: judicial revoicing, corroborative authority, procedural gatekeeping, and legal thresholding. Objectively, this distribution shows that no single operation monopolises institutional authority. Instead, institutional power works through a distributed arrangement: documents and objects stabilise accounts, expert reports mediate vulnerability, procedural rules regulate admissibility, and judicial wording converts testimony into belief, doubt, or legal insufficiency. The corpus therefore shows a layered form of testimonial control, in which institutional language does not merely receive evidence but actively formats how evidence can be recognised.

Theoretically, this pattern strengthens the central argument that credibility in sexual violence judgments is produced at the intersection of language, gendered narration, and institutional authority. Judicial revoicing gives testimony legal grammar; corroboration gives it evidentiary support; procedure gives it admissibility; and thresholding gives it consequence. This does not mean that institutional mediation is inherently illegitimate, because legal adjudication necessarily requires rules of proof. The critical point is that such mediation shapes whose voice can travel successfully through legal reasoning. In this sense, this study links forensic linguistic analysis with feminist legal theory and epistemic injustice scholarship: credibility is not only assessed by courts, but also institutionally manufactured through the textual organisation of belief.

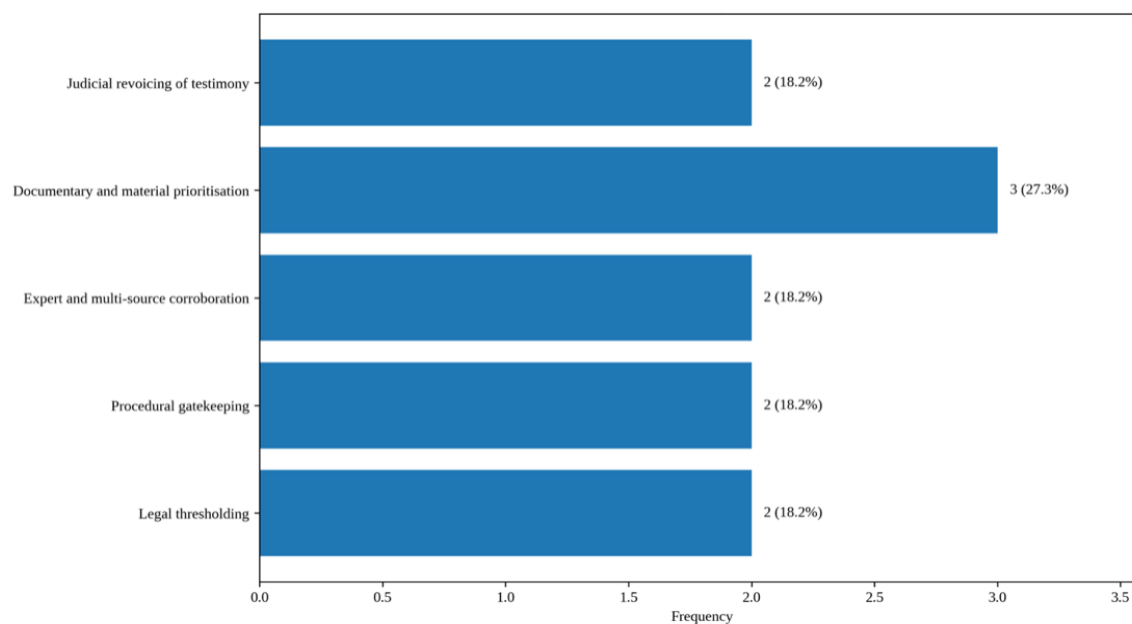


Figure 4. Institutional power operations in judgment-related text units

Table 4. Institutional power operations in judgment-related text units

Subcategory	Institutional Marker	Site of Power	Frequency	Percentage	Data Variation	Representative Textual Evidence	Data Code
Judicial revoicing of testimony	Reported speech, evidential uptake, judicial paraphrase	Court's argumentative voice	2	18.2%	Testimony placed within evidentiary sequence and conviction reasoning	"Setelah mendengar keterangan Saksi-saksi, Ahli dan Terdakwa..."; "merujuk pada keterangan saksi korban untuk memperkuat keyakinan..."	TXT-003; TXT-010
Documentary and material prioritisation	Visum reference, documentary proof, object inventory	Medical, written, and object-based evidence	3	27.3%	Medical report, evidentiary document, mobile phone/object evidence	"Berdasarkan Visum et Repertum Nomor ..."; "bukti surat berupa Hasil Pemeriksaan Visum ..."; "1 (satu) buah HP merek Samsung ..."	TXT-005; TXT-007; TXT-008
Expert and multi-source corroboration	Psychological report, disability status, de auditu testimony, expert support	Expert and supporting evidentiary network	2	18.2%	Child-victim assessment and disability-related evidentiary layering	"Berdasarkan Hasil Pemeriksaan Psikologis terhadap Saksi Anak ..."; "Visum et Repertum, hasil pemeriksaan psikologis"	TXT-004; TXT-011
Oath status and legal admissibility	Unsworn testimony, accompaniment, validity marker	Procedural rules of testimonial acceptance	2	18.2%	Child victim testimony, oath status, and legal recognition	"Anak Korban, tidak disumpah ... didampingi ibu kandungnya"; "keterangan saksi korban (yang tidak disumpah) sebagai alat bukti yang sah"	TXT-006; TXT-009
Disbelief and statutory-element filtering	Negative credibility predicate, absence of judicial conviction, statutory formulation	Judicial certainty and proof threshold	2	18.2%	Disbelief of testimony and failure to meet legal elements	"keterangan anak saksi Saksi Korban tidak dapat dipercaya..."; "Majelis Hakim tidak memperoleh keyakinan..."	TXT-001; TXT-002
			11	100%			

5. DISCUSSION

The first implication of this study concerns how credibility operates as a textual function within sexual violence judgments. The findings show that testimony becomes legally meaningful not simply because a victim, defendant, or witness speaks, but because judicial language converts speech into belief, doubt, corroboration, admissibility, or insufficiency. This matters because credibility is often treated as an evidentiary assessment, whereas the analysed units show that it is also a linguistic accomplishment. The functional value of this mechanism is clear: courts require a structured way to distinguish persuasive evidence from unsupported assertion. Yet its dysfunction lies in the possibility that testimony may be weakened when it does not fit preferred forms of legal readability, such as coherent sequencing, documentary support, or expert mediation. This finding extends work by Denault and Talwar (2024) [1], Badino et al. (2025) [2], and Verschuere et al. (2025) [3], but shifts attention from credibility assessment to credibility textualisation.

The underlying structure behind this pattern is the legal dependence on institutionalised forms of certainty. The analysed texts show that credibility is repeatedly attached to markers such as judicial conviction, medical documentation, psychological reports, oath status, and evidentiary sequencing. This does not mean that courts mechanically distrust victims without corroboration, nor that corroboration is inherently unjust. Rather, this study suggests that credibility is organised through a hierarchy of evidentiary recognisability: testimony is strongest when it can be aligned with authorised documents, expert discourse, or statutory elements. This finding partly supports Goodman-Delahunty et al. (2021) [16], who show that legal knowledge can enhance credibility assessment, yet it also resonates with Bublitz's (2023) [7] warning that disbelief may become epistemically unjust when institutional procedure reshapes speakers into deficient knowers.

The second implication concerns the gendered narration of victimhood. The findings show that vulnerability is visible in the corpus, especially through child-victim status, unsworn testimony, accompaniment, psychological assessment, and disability-related evidentiary layering. This visibility is important because it indicates that judicial texts do not entirely erase vulnerability. However, vulnerability becomes legally useful only after being procedurally managed, corroborated, or translated into recognised evidentiary categories. Its function is thus ambivalent: it can support protection and legal recognition, but it can also discipline the conditions under which victimhood becomes believable. This pattern aligns with Ailwood (2025) [4], Mariano (2025) [5], and Stepnitz (2023) [6], who argue that victim-witnesses often face a double demand to appear harmed yet coherent, vulnerable yet credible.

The structure behind gendered narrative positioning lies in what feminist scholarship has described as the normative script of the believable victim. The analysed units suggest that victim testimony gains force when attached to familiar markers: childhood, bodily trace, psychological evaluation, procedural vulnerability, or corroborative support. This does not prove that judges intentionally apply a "perfect victim" template, and this study does not infer judicial motive. It does show, however, that legal texts tend to stabilise victim narratives through recognisable signs of vulnerability and injury. This supports Habba et al. (2023) [8], Pereira et al. (2022) [20], and Williams and Jobe (2024) [9], who demonstrate that credibility is unevenly distributed across victim identities and narrative forms. At the same time, the findings complicate a simple critique of corroboration: in sexual violence cases, corroboration may protect against arbitrary judgment, but it may also narrow the range of narratable harm that can count as legally credible.

The third implication concerns institutional power as the textual organisation of testimony. The findings show that courts exercise power not only through verdicts, but through the prior ordering of voices and evidentiary materials. Victim testimony, defendant denial, witness statements, expert reports, medical documents, object evidence, and statutory thresholds are not placed on a flat textual plane. They are sequenced, attributed, ranked, and revoiced through judicial language. This has a functional role: judgment-writing must organise complex evidence into a legally reasoned decision. Yet the potential dysfunction is that institutional revoicing may reduce lived experience into evidentiary abstraction, especially when victim speech becomes authoritative only after being absorbed into the court's argumentative voice. This finding resonates with Setiaji (2026) [28], Setiyawan (2026) [19], and Sadani (2026) [29], who treat Indonesian legal discourse as a site where authority is produced through apparently neutral legal language.

The deeper structure behind this institutional pattern is the asymmetry between testimonial experience and legal uptake. Sexual violence testimony often begins as a narrative of harm, fear, coercion, vulnerability, or violation, but judicial texts must translate it into categories of proof, elements, admissibility, and conviction. This translation is necessary for adjudication, but it is never linguistically neutral. This study therefore extends forensic linguistic and feminist legal scholarship by showing that credibility is produced where three forces converge: testimonial wording, gendered expectations of victimhood, and institutional

authority over legal meaning. This interpretation is consistent with Knowles (2021) [21] and Wallace (2021) [22], who emphasise the difficulty of articulating gendered violence within inherited frameworks of understanding.

6. CONCLUSION

This study shows that belief in Indonesian sexual violence judgments is not merely recorded as an evidentiary conclusion, but produced through the linguistic organisation of testimony, corroboration, gendered vulnerability, and institutional authority. The central lesson is that credibility operates as a textual process: victim testimony becomes believable, doubtful, admissible, or insufficient through judicial revoicing, evidentiary hierarchy, procedural framing, and legal thresholding. Its main contribution lies in shifting analysis from whether testimony is accepted to how belief is linguistically made possible. By combining forensic linguistics, feminist legal theory, and critical legal discourse analysis, this study offers a more precise method for examining credibility in gendered adjudication.

This study is limited by its reliance on written judgments and judgment-related public documents, which means it cannot capture courtroom interaction, judicial intention, lawyer questioning, witness emotion, or institutional decision-making outside the text. Its corpus also supports interpretive textual analysis rather than causal claims about verdict outcomes. Future research should expand the dataset across jurisdictions, court levels, offence types, and post-UU TPKS decisions, while comparing written judgments with trial transcripts where ethically and legally accessible. Further studies could also examine how credibility is shaped by age, disability, class, region, language, and legal representation in Indonesian sexual violence adjudication.

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AI USE DECLARATION

The author used artificial intelligence tools to assist with the generation of illustrative figures and with the formatting and layout of this manuscript. AI was not used to generate the substantive content, conceptualization, data, analysis, or conclusions of the research, all of which remain the sole responsibility of the author.

INFORMED CONSENT

Not applicable – this study did not involve direct human participants. Data consisted solely of publicly accessible court judgments and judgment-linked legal documents.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

This research did not involve human or animal subjects; it analyzed publicly accessible court judgments and judgment-linked legal documents, and therefore no institutional review board approval was required.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The corpus of documents analyzed in this study are publicly accessible and available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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