

## Knowledge and Prevalence of Sexual Grooming in Academia: Basis for Awareness Campaign

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### ABSTRACT

*This research aims to illuminate sexual grooming in academic settings, underscoring the imperative for awareness and preventive measures. The study is theoretically grounded in Ward and Sieger's Pathways Model, incorporating Finkelhor's Precondition Model, Marshall and Barbaree's Integrated Theory, and Hall and Hirschman's Quadripartite Model. This comprehensive framework provides a nuanced understanding of the psychological mechanisms at play in sexual grooming. To address gaps in educators' awareness, the study utilizes random sampling to assess 25 teachers from senior high and tertiary levels. A survey instrument, featuring closed and Likert scale questions, gauges respondents' knowledge of sexual grooming definitions, signs, and prevalence in academia. Aligned with the UNICEF report on child sexual violence, the study underscores the urgency of tackling such issues. The conceptual framework employs the input-process-output model, considering teachers' profiles, survey responses, and potential implications for an awareness campaign. The methodology incorporates a structured online questionnaire covering demographic information, knowledge assessment, training awareness, reporting procedures, and the perceived importance of addressing sexual grooming. By exploring educators' comprehension and experiences regarding sexual grooming, this research strives to contribute to a safer learning environment. The findings will inform targeted training programs and bolster child protection measures within educational institutions. As dedicated proponents of the Department of Education's mission, the study endeavors to bridge the awareness gap and foster child-friendly, secure, and motivating academic environments.*

### KEYWORDS

*grooming; groomer; sexual grooming; academe; awareness campaign.*

### INTRODUCTION

As stated in the Code of Ethics for Professional Teachers from the professional Regulation Commission (PRC) in Sectional of Article III The Teacher and the Community, "A teacher is a facilitator of Learning and the development of the youth; he shall, therefore, render the best service by providing an environment conducive to learning and growth"

But despite that, there are a concerning number of cases as provided by the Department of Education's Learner Rights and Protection Office (LRPO) in which there were 77 filed reports of verbal abuse, 70 of sexual abuse, and 66 of physical bullying all of which are

violence involved. All three cases mentioned can be also aligned with another disturbing concern about sexual grooming.

In 2022, Vice News released a study regarding abuses conducted by school staff, their classmates, and especially teachers. It detailed that from ages 12 to 17 years old the 950 Filipino children surveyed were victims of sexual exploitation and abuse. It mentions non-consensual and coercion to engage in sexual activities in exchange for monetary and gifts.

In the same year, information shared by an X app user (formerly Twitter) said that there were students from Bacoor National High School in Cavite who shared their unfortunate experiences with the seven teachers. DepEd Spokesperson Michael Poa noted the allegations were “very disturbing” knowing that professional teachers were involved.

Particularly a place where the students should have an environment where they can feel safe and secure in which unfortunately the academe is not an exception. This is one of the many issues that we still have to constantly campaign against these perpetrators who are lurking in academia.

The term Grooming in Merriam-Webster Dictionary is a verb when someone is preparing for something. Meanwhile, in Oxford references, it is a type of behavior of a man or even a woman that manipulates a child to trust and be dependent on them in exchange for sexual favors. Hence, the term Sexual Grooming.

Shishira Sreenivas (n/d) explained sexual grooming is when an adult begins a relationship with a child through manipulation. An individual who works his or her way to manipulate a child is a Groomer.

A groomer will give positive compliments, be friends with the vulnerable target, give money, and buy gifts to gain the victim's trust and eventually use this for sexual favors or coercion that might lead to verbal, physical, and emotional abuse.

Additionally, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children explained that “anybody can be a groomer, no matter their age, gender, or race” educational institutions are not an exemption. Children will unlikely have no impression that they are being groomed. These are some of the signs of grooming to watch out for:

1. A child is being secretive about whom they are spending time with, may it be personal or online
2. Has a huge age gap relationship with an individual
3. Has unexplainable material things or money that they can't explain where it came from
4. Knows sexualized activities, words, or an understanding of sex that is not appropriate for their age
5. Spending their time away from home or going missing for some time.

While initiatives and efforts are being made to address the issue there are still a lot of Educators who are not familiar with what sexual grooming is and how it happens and affects learners. To raise awareness, this research will gather information as to how aware the faculty members both from senior high and tertiary levels and schools when it comes to the topic. What are the precautionary steps taken by the educational institutions?

### **Statement of the Problem**

The study seeks to provide information regarding the level of knowledge of the respondents regarding the definitions and signs to look out for. And use the data gathered to show how rampant is sexual grooming in academia and utilize its findings in crafting an awareness campaign.

In this study, 25 random teachers across from senior high and tertiary levels and schools are evaluated for their level of knowledge when it comes to what is sexual grooming.

1. What is the knowledge of the respondents in sexual grooming in terms of
  - 1.1 Definition
  - 1.2 Signs of Sexual Grooming
2. How prevalent is sexual grooming in academia?
3. How may findings be utilized in crafting an awareness campaign

### **Theoretical Framework**

This research is anchored on Ward and Sieger's Pathways Model. It is called that way because they believe that there are five pathways to sexual offenses against children. The said model is comprehensive because it knits together the three dominant theories about child sexual grooming, namely Finkelhor's Precondition Model (1984); Marshall and Barbaree's Integrated Theory (1990); and Hall and Hirschman's Quadripartite Model (1992)

The succeeding paragraphs will explain the three theories that serve as the foundation of Ward and Sieger's Pathways Model. Moreover, how do these theories relate to the context of sexual grooming in academia? the Integrated Theory of Marshall and Barbaree's (1990) on sexual offending explains that the presence of vulnerabilities, which develop as a result of adverse early developmental experiences, leaves offenders unprepared to deal with the surge of hormones at puberty and unable to understand the emotional world. As a result, offenders satisfy their emotional and sexual needs inappropriately and in deviant ways. This theory suggests that sexual offense occurs as a consequence of an individual's sex and aggression drives becoming fused, as these functions share the same structure in the brain. Ward and Siegert (2002) state that this need not be the case, as many functions are close in proximity but do not affect each other. The downside of this theory is its description that sexual offenses are aggressive. It contradicts what exists in the academia, the process of sexual grooming that happens in the academia is generally non-aggressive.

Hall and Hirschman's (1992) quadripartite model propose that someone commits an act of child sexual abuse because of four vulnerability factors and the presence of opportunity. The vulnerability factors are physiological sexual arousal and distorted cognitions that act to justify sexual aggression, affective decontrol, and personality problems. It is suggested that offenses will occur when these vulnerability factors exceed a threshold; this could include one or all of these vulnerabilities. One of the problems with this theory relates to the presence of opportunity. In academia, offenders can use power plays and other acts to create opportunities to offend. Therefore, sexual grooming is not an impulsive act, as described in the theory.

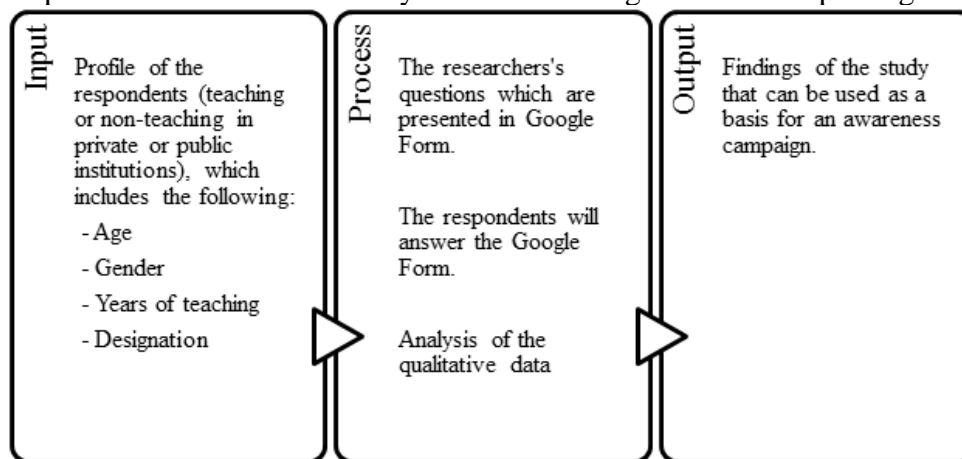
Finkelhor's Pre-condition Model (1984) suggests that there are four pre-conditions to sexual offense. The first is the motivation to sexually abuse; it is suggested that this develops as a result of emotional congruence (a fit between the offender's emotional needs and the child's ability to meet them), deviant sexual arousal, and blockage (the sexual needs of the offender not being met by appropriate adults). The second is to overcome internal inhibitors; the third is to overcome external inhibitors; and the fourth is to overcome the child's resistance. Before an incidence of abuse would take place, these preconditions needed to be satisfied. Although Finkelhor does not use the term sexual grooming, others (e.g., Morrison, Erooga, & Beckett, 1994; Sampson, 1994) have reviewed his work using this term. They referred to overcoming the child's resistance as grooming. In academia, offenders can overcome resistance by using the students' academic performance as one of the consequences.

Ward and Siegert's (2002) model consolidate the three theories mentioned. It is based on the dysfunction of one or more psychological mechanisms: emotional regulation, intimacy deficits, cognitive distortions, and sexual arousal (deviant sexual scripts). All the

aforementioned psychological mechanisms are involved to some degree. There is evidence of these dysfunctional mechanisms being present. Typically, in child molesters, although to different degrees and for different functions. The five possible pathways are specified by whichever dysfunctional psychological mechanism is the most dominant; in turn, this will affect the others. In the case of the fifth pathway, all the psychological mechanisms would be similarly dysfunctional. A sexual offense occurs when the above is present in conjunction with sexual need.

### **Research Methods Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework of the study is shown in the given research paradigm below.



**Figure 1.** The Paradigm of the Study

According to the United Nations Fund (Unicef) 17.1 percent of children 13 to 18 years old - have experienced sexual violence while growing up, and 5.3 percent of the cases were committed in schools. Therefore, concrete actions must be taken to address these issues. As researchers who are also teachers who abide by the Department of Education’s mission “*Students learn in a child-friendly, gender-sensitive, safe, and motivating environment.*” the study aims to contribute to finding solutions and raising awareness of the sexual grooming that is happening in academia (Zahro, A., Dalimunthe, R., Elbaar, E. F., & Rapita, D. D. (2023)).

In this study, the input-process-output was utilized as a conceptual design. In the conduct of the study, the inputs were the profile of the respondents (teaching or non-teaching in private or public institutions), which includes their age, gender, years of teaching, and designation. To gather the data, a survey was conducted using Google Forms. The findings of the study will be used as a basis for an awareness campaign.

### **RESEARCH METHODS**

This study aims to assess teachers' understanding of the terminology and indicators of sexual grooming. Sexual grooming is a highly significant matter that can have profound repercussions on the welfare of pupils. Teachers have a vital role in recognizing and stopping cases of sexual grooming, which is the act of establishing a relationship with a child to sexually exploit them. Educators must possess comprehensive knowledge of the definition and indicators of sexual grooming to establish a learning environment that is both safe and secure. The objective of this research is to uncover deficiencies in teachers' comprehension of sexual grooming to provide focused training programs and improve the overall security of educational settings.



The study utilized the Random Sampling method through an online survey, aiming to obtain a sample that is representative and considers statistical power and precision. The target population consisted of 25 teachers from across senior high and tertiary levels and schools. Random sampling is a research technique that guarantees an equal opportunity for every individual in a population to be selected for a study. When evaluating teachers' understanding of sexual grooming, random sampling entails choosing a sample of instructors that is both random and typical of the wider community. The data collection method employed is the use of self-administered structured online questionnaires. Incorporate both questions with limited response options and questions using a Likert scale. The instrumentation required for this task is to create a questionnaire consisting of items that pertain to the precise definition of sexual grooming. Identification of indicators and actions linked to the process of sexual grooming.

Below is a compilation of queries that can be used as a basis for starting a discussion. These inquiries are clear, and concise, and cover various aspects of the topic matter.

***Demographic Information:***

1. What is your age?
  - Under 25
  - 25-34
  - 35-44
  - 45-54
  - 55 and above
2. What is your gender?
  - Male
  - Female
  - Non-binary
  - Prefer not to say
3. How many years of teaching experience do you have?
4. What grade level(s) do you currently teach?

***Knowledge of Sexual Grooming:***

5. How would you deal with the situation if you knew someone experiencing sexual grooming in educational institutions?
6. Please indicate your level of familiarity with the signs of sexual grooming:
  - Very familiar
  - Somewhat familiar
  - Neutral
  - Somewhat unfamiliar
  - Very unfamiliar
7. What do you think are the signs that a person is experiencing sexual grooming?
8. How confident do you feel in recognizing and addressing potential cases of sexual grooming in your school?
  - Very confident
  - Confident
  - Neutral
  - Not very confident
  - Not confident at all



**Training and Awareness:**

9. Have you received any formal training on recognizing and preventing sexual grooming?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Not sure
10. If yes, please briefly describe the nature of the training you have received.
11. How frequently does your school provide training or information sessions on child protection and sexual grooming prevention?
  - Regularly
  - Occasionally
  - Rarely
  - Never

**Reporting Procedures:**

12. Are you aware of the reporting procedures in place at your school for suspected cases of sexual grooming?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Partially
13. How confident are you in your knowledge of the steps to take if you suspect a case of sexual grooming?
  - Very confident
  - Confident
  - Neutral
  - Not very confident
  - Not confident at all

**Perceived Importance:**

14. On a scale from 1 to 5, how important do you believe it is for teachers to be knowledgeable about sexual grooming in an educational setting? (1 = Not important at all, 5 = Extremely important)
15. What actions, if any, do you think schools should take to enhance teachers' knowledge and awareness of sexual grooming?

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The survey captured a diverse demographic profile, with a mix of male and female respondents, varying levels of teaching experience, and a focus on high school both junior and senior high and tertiary level. The study utilized the Random Sampling method through an online survey, aiming to obtain a sample that is representative and considers statistical power and precision. The target population consisted of 25 teachers from across senior high and tertiary levels and schools. Random sampling is a research technique that guarantees an equal opportunity for every individual in a population to be selected for a study. When evaluating teachers' understanding of sexual grooming, random sampling entails choosing a sample of instructors that is both random and typical of the wider community. The data collection method employed is the use of self-administered structured online questionnaires. Incorporate both questions with limited response options and questions using a Likert scale. The instrumentation required for this task is to create a questionnaire consisting of items that



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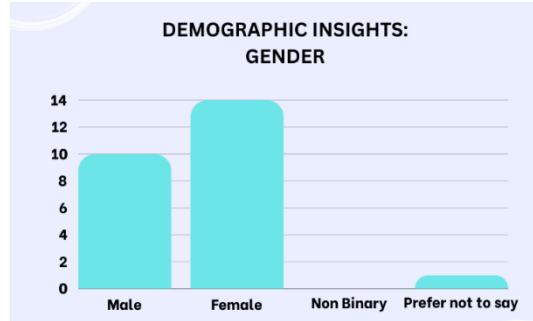


Figure 2. Demographic Insights: Gender

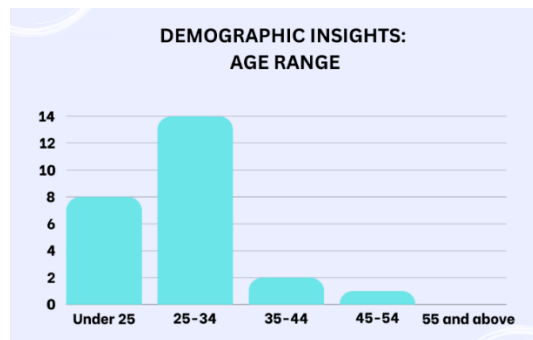


Figure 3. Demographic Insights: Age Range

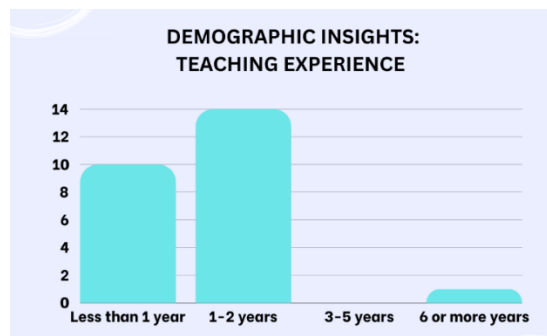


Figure 4. Demographic Insights: Teaching Experience

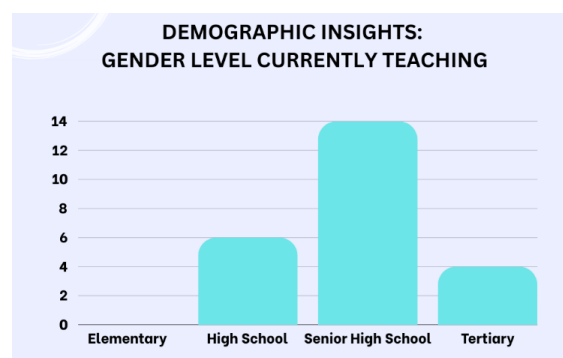
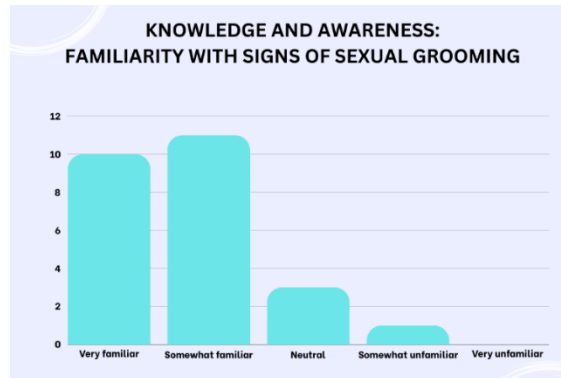
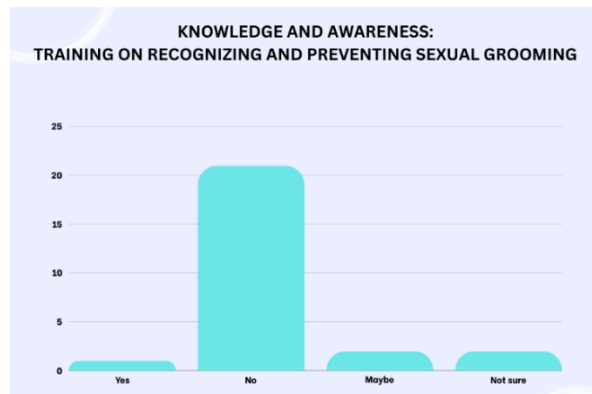


Figure 5. Demographic Insights; Gender Level Currently Teaching

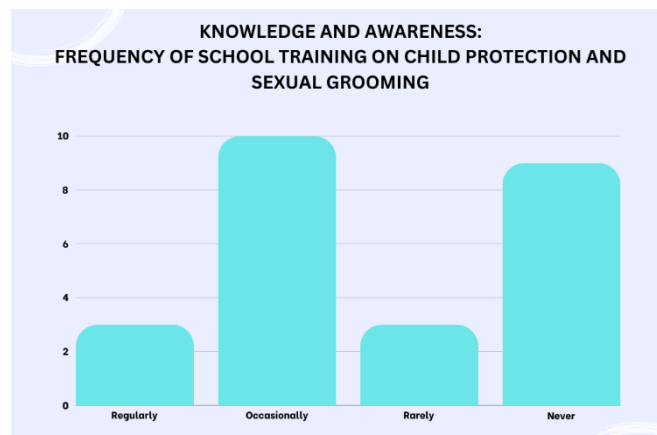
In this bar graph representing demographics, participants are categorized based on gender, age range, teaching experience, and the grade level they currently teach. The x-axis displays these categories, while the y-axis represents the count or percentage of participants falling into each category. For instance, the gender distribution shows that 40% of participants identify as male, 56% as female, and 4% either as non-binary or prefer not to say. Similarly, age range distribution, teaching experience, and grade level currently teaching are visually presented to provide a comprehensive view of the demographic composition of the participant pool.



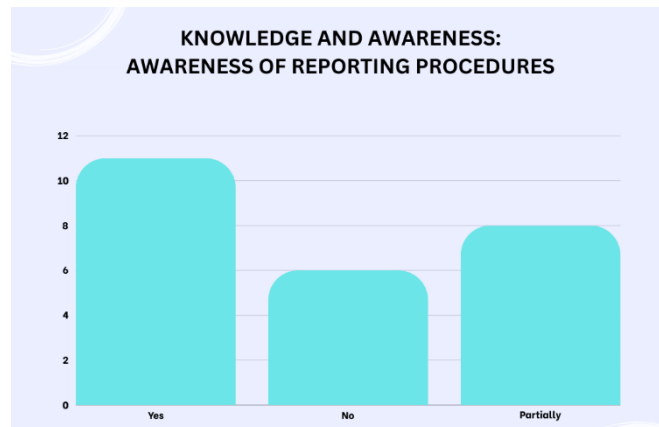
**Figure 6.** Knowledge and Awareness Familiarity with Signs of Sexual Grooming



**Figure 7.** Knowledge and Awareness: Training on Recognizing and Preventing Sexual Grooming

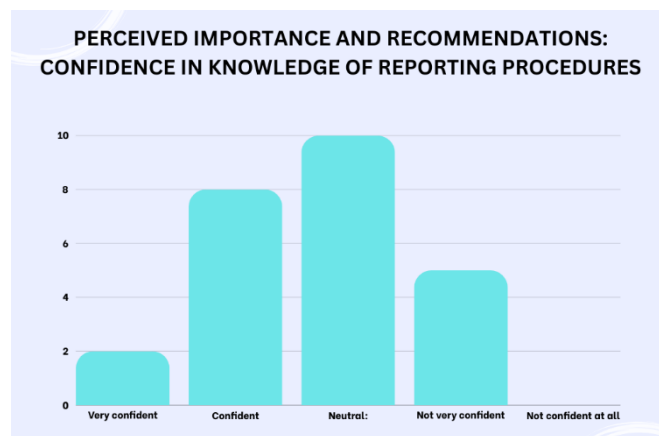


**Figure 8.** Knowledge and awareness: Frequency of School Training on Child Protection and Sexual Grooming



**Figure 9.** Knowledge and Awareness: Awareness of Reporting Procedures

This bar chart focuses on participants' knowledge and awareness of sexual grooming. The x-axis represents different aspects, including familiarity with signs of sexual grooming, confidence in recognizing and addressing cases, training on sexual grooming, frequency of school training, awareness of reporting procedures, and confidence in knowledge of reporting procedures. The y-axis depicts the count or percentage of participants falling into each category. This visual representation enables a clear understanding of participants' levels of awareness and knowledge regarding sexual grooming issues.



**Figure 10.** Perceived Importance and Recommendations: Confidence in Knowledge of Reporting Procedures

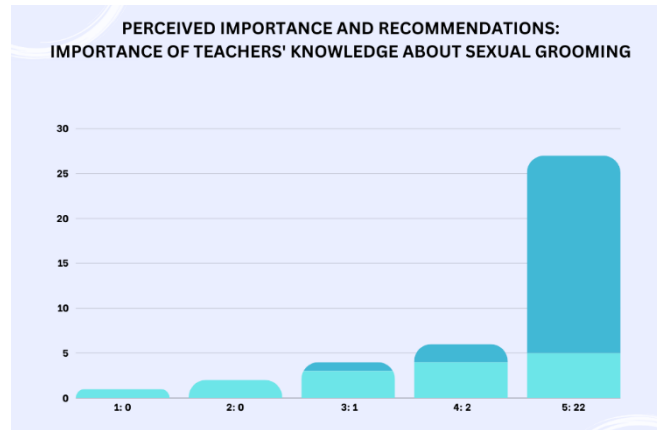


Figure 11. Perceived Importance and Recommendation: Importance of Teachers' Knowledge About Sexual Grooming

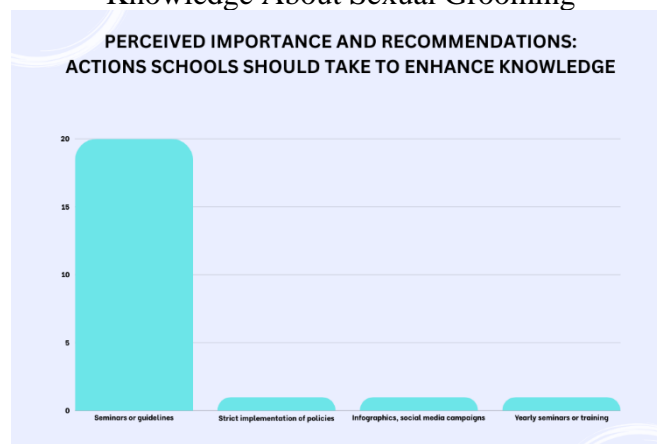


Figure 12. Perceived Importance and Recommendations: Action Schools Should Take to Enhance Knowledge

In this bar graph, participants' perceptions regarding the importance of teachers' knowledge about sexual grooming are depicted. The x-axis represents the perceived importance ratings on a scale of 1 to 5, and the y-axis displays the count or percentage of participants for each rating. Additionally, the graph includes qualitative data on recommended actions schools should take to enhance knowledge, providing a snapshot of participants' opinions on strategies such as seminars, strict policy implementation, and social media campaigns.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research aimed to investigate the knowledge and prevalence of sexual grooming among educators and professionals in academia. The respondents, consisting of educators from various institutions, provided valuable insights into their awareness, confidence levels, and the existing training and reporting procedures related to sexual grooming.

- **Knowledge and Awareness:**
  - ✓ The majority of respondents demonstrated a commendable level of familiarity with the signs of sexual grooming, with 84% indicating some degree of familiarity.
  - ✓ However, confidence in recognizing and addressing potential cases varied, highlighting the need for targeted training and support.
- **Training and Reporting Procedures:**



- ✓ A significant portion of respondents (84%) reported not having received formal training on recognizing and preventing sexual grooming, suggesting a gap in preparedness.
- ✓ Awareness of reporting procedures was mixed, with 44% indicating awareness, while the remaining respondents were either unaware or partially aware.
- **Perceived Importance and Recommendations:**
  - ✓ The respondents overwhelmingly acknowledged the critical importance of teachers being knowledgeable about sexual grooming, with 88% rating it as extremely important.
  - ✓ Recommendations for enhancing knowledge included seminars, guidelines, strict policy implementation, and the use of information campaigns.

### **Implications:**

- **Training Needs:** The findings imply the need for institutions to prioritize and provide regular training sessions on recognizing and preventing sexual grooming, ensuring that educators are equipped to address such cases effectively.
- **Awareness Campaigns:** The high perceived importance of knowledge in this area suggests that awareness campaigns and educational initiatives would be well-received. Institutions can consider implementing these campaigns to foster a safe learning environment.
- **Policy Enhancement:** Recommendations for strict policy implementation indicate a collective call for institutions to strengthen their existing protocols related to child protection and sexual grooming prevention.

### **Limitations:**

- **Limited Training:** The majority of respondents reported not having received formal training on the subject, highlighting potential limitations in their preparedness to handle cases of sexual grooming.
- **Sample Size and Representation:** The survey's sample size is relatively small and may not fully represent the broader educational landscape. Future research could involve a larger and more diverse participant pool.

### **Recommendation**

This study hopes to lay the groundwork for future research focusing on the development and implementation of targeted training programs, assessment of the effectiveness of awareness campaigns, and continuous evaluation of institutional policies to address sexual grooming in academic settings.

In conclusion, this survey catalyzes ongoing efforts to create a safer and more informed educational environment, emphasizing the crucial role of educators in safeguarding the well-being of students.

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