

# HAMEMAYU HAYUNING BAWANA AS CULTURAL CAPITAL IN THE POST-TRAUMATIC RECOVERY AND GROWTH OF SEXTORTION VICTIMS IN INDONESIA

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## Abstract

This study explores the integration of Hamemayu Hayuning Bawana (HHB) a Javanese philosophical value emphasizing moral refinement and harmony with the universe as a cultural framework for post-traumatic recovery among sextortion survivors in Indonesia. Using a mixed-method explanatory research design, the study involved 137 participants who completed the Impact of Event Scale-Revised (IES-R), followed by in-depth interviews with three female survivors and two Javanese cultural experts. Quantitative data revealed high levels of post-traumatic distress, particularly in the dimension of avoidance, while qualitative findings illustrated seven stages of recovery aligned with the Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) model. Survivors demonstrated psychological adaptation through processes of self-reflection, social support, emotional regulation, and spiritual renewal. The integration of HHB values *Mangasah Mingising Budi* (moral and cognitive refinement) and *Memasuh Malaning Bumi* (restoring balance and cleansing negativity) facilitated the development of new meaning, resilience, and self-acceptance. The study proposes a culturally grounded self-help model for trauma recovery that bridges indigenous philosophy and psychological theory, offering implications for culturally responsive counseling practices in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** : PTG, sextortion, trauma recovery, cultural

## Introduction

Online sexual extortion, commonly known as sextortion, has emerged as one of the most alarming forms of digital crime in Indonesia in recent years. Data indicate a significant increase in the number of sextortion cases nationwide. According to the *Global Corruption Barometer Asia* (2020), approximately 18% of respondents in Indonesia reported having experienced or known a victim of sextortion the highest percentage in Asia (Syauket et al., 2022). Similarly, the *CATAHU Report* by Komnas Perempuan (2022) recorded 1,721 cases of online gender-based violence (GBV), with sextortion identified as one of the most frequently reported forms (Al Fikry, 2022). Furthermore, data from the *Southeast Asia Freedom of Expression Network* (SAFEnet) covering January–March 2024 documented 90 cases of sextortion out of 480 GBV complaints, with most victims aged 18–25 years.

These figures highlight sextortion as a complex form of gender-based violence that intertwines power relations, digital technology, and socio-cultural inequalities. Beyond material losses, sextortion inflicts profound psychological harm, including anxiety, guilt, diminished self-esteem, and long-term trauma. Consequently, victim recovery efforts

must extend beyond legal interventions to include comprehensive psychological and cultural dimensions.

The term sextortion combines “sexual” and “extortion,” referring to sexual coercion in which perpetrators exploit the threat of exposing victims’ intimate content to gain personal benefits, financial, sexual, or behavioral compliance (Transparency International, 2020; *Kompas*, 2021). In practice, sextortion does not always occur between anonymous individuals online but often involves close relationships such as friends, partners, or former lovers who possess access to the victim’s private data.

Common forms of sextortion include: (1) threats to distribute intimate photos or videos (*image-based sexual abuse*), (2) financial extortion disguised as protection of the victim’s reputation, (3) coercion to provide additional sexual content, and (4) psychological pressure through intimidation or emotional manipulation. These characteristics make sextortion a crime that not only targets victims’ material resources but also violates their integrity and dignity through fear, shame, and social or emotional isolation.

For victims, sextortion often triggers severe psychological reactions. Many experience trauma symptoms such as intrusion (recurrent traumatic memories), avoidance (efforts to avoid trauma-related cues), and hyperarousal (heightened vigilance and anxiety), all of which disrupt daily functioning (Wang, 2025). This indicates that addressing sextortion should not end with legal prosecution but must also incorporate holistic psychological recovery approaches..

One theoretical framework that explains psychological recovery following trauma is the concept of Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG). PTG refers to positive psychological change experienced after adversity through enhanced personal strength, spirituality, social relationships, and meaning-making (Farida et al., 2023; Rosenthal et al., 2024). Thus, trauma does not necessarily end in suffering but can serve as a transformative point for self-reconstruction and personal growth.

However, the process toward post-traumatic growth is highly personal and deeply influenced by sociocultural context (Shahabi et al., 2025). In the Indonesian cultural setting, recovery may be interpreted through the Javanese philosophy of Hamemayu Hayuning Bawana (HHB). Rooted in two central teachings *Mangasah Mingising Budi* (refining moral wisdom) and *Memasuh Malaning Bumi* (cleansing the world of impurity) HHB emphasizes harmony among thought, feeling, and action (Jati et al., 2022; Yardan et al., 2024). This philosophy aligns with the psychological aim of trauma recovery: to regain balance and harmony within oneself and one’s environment.

While several studies have highlighted the importance of cultural perspectives in psychological interventions, few have explored the integration of indigenous wisdom—such as HHB—within trauma recovery for sextortion survivors. This gap underscores the potential of culturally grounded approaches to create more contextual and locally relevant counseling models.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the meaning of *Hamemayu Hayuning Bawana* in the psychological recovery of sextortion survivors through the lens of Post-Traumatic Growth theory. It also seeks to develop HHB-based counseling recommendations that emphasize psychological restoration and cultural empowerment.

By integrating psychological perspectives with local wisdom, this study aspires to enrich the discourse on multicultural counseling in Indonesia and contribute to the development of culturally sensitive, humanistic, and contextually grounded counseling practices.

## Method

This study employed a mixed-methods approach using an explanatory sequential design, beginning with quantitative data collection followed by qualitative exploration to gain a deeper understanding of trauma recovery among sextortion survivors through the perspectives of *Post-Traumatic Growth* (PTG) and *Hamemayu Hayuning Bawana* (HHB) philosophy. This approach was chosen to ensure that the quantitative data provided a general overview of the phenomenon under study, while the qualitative data enriched the interpretation of findings through narrative insights and the meaning of survivors' lived experiences (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

The initial stage of the study involved distributing an online questionnaire to 137 respondents using a purposive sampling technique with the following criteria: (1) individuals aged 18 years or older, (2) those who had experienced sextortion, and (3) voluntary participation with signed informed consent. Data collection took place from July 24 to August 8, 2025, using Google Forms, with full assurance of participant confidentiality.

The main instrument used in the quantitative phase was the Impact of Event Scale–Revised (IES-R) developed by Christianson and Marren (2012). This scale measures post-event trauma levels across three dimensions: intrusion, avoidance, and hyperarousal. The instrument underwent content validation with academic supervisors to ensure item relevance to the study's context, showing good internal consistency. Collected data were analyzed descriptively using SPSS Statistics 22 to obtain frequency distributions, mean values, and trauma severity levels among respondents.

The second stage of the study was conducted qualitatively using two approaches: case study and ethnography. The case study approach aimed to explore the dynamics of sextortion survivors' recovery in depth. Three female participants aged 18–25 years were selected based on the highest IES-R scores and their willingness to be interviewed. Semi-structured interviews were guided by the Post-Traumatic Growth framework, encompassing aspects of personal strength, social relationships, and life meaning. All interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent and transcribed verbatim for data analysis purposes.

The ethnographic approach was employed to understand the meaning and manifestation of *Hamemayu Hayuning Bawana* values in the survivors' recovery process. Two Javanese cultural experts were purposively selected as key informants to elaborate on HHB philosophy and validate its application in psychological contexts. The interview data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (1994), consisting of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. To facilitate coding and thematic categorization, MAXQDA 2024 software was utilized.

All stages of the study adhered to the ethical principles of psychological research, including respect for participant autonomy, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw at any time without consequence. The validity and reliability of findings were strengthened through source triangulation between quantitative data, survivor interviews, and cultural expert insights, as well as member checking to ensure the accuracy of researchers' interpretations.

## Result and Discussion

Data analysis was conducted to answer the research questions, which are presented systematically according to the study's findings below.

### 1. Overview of Cases and Victims' Trauma Levels

The initial survey of 137 respondents revealed that 63.5% had experienced sextortion, with the majority being female (82.48%) and aged between 18 and 25 years. This

confirms the tendency that sextortion victims are predominantly young women who are active digital media users and vulnerable to manipulative online relationships.

Trauma levels measured using the Impact of Event Scale–Revised (IES-R) indicated that most victims experienced high levels of post-traumatic distress, particularly in the avoidance dimension ( $M = 24.30$ ;  $SD = 6.81$ ). This suggests a strong tendency among victims to avoid situations, conversations, or stimuli that remind them of the traumatic event. The intrusion ( $M = 22.50$ ;  $SD = 7.70$ ) and hyperarousal ( $M = 16.35$ ;  $SD = 6.47$ ) dimensions also revealed significant symptoms such as recurring thoughts, nightmares, and heightened alertness. These findings align with Wang (2025), who emphasized that sextortion-related trauma is marked by the interplay of fear, shame, and mistrust toward one's social environment.

Psychologically, these symptom patterns reflect an early unresolved post-trauma phase in which victims continue to struggle to reorganize negative experiences to prevent them from dominating daily functioning. The quantitative results formed the basis for selecting three primary participants for in-depth qualitative interviews to explore their recovery processes more comprehensively.

## 2. The Dynamics of Sextortion Survivors' Recovery Based on Post-Traumatic Growth

Qualitative analysis revealed that all three participants underwent similar psychological dynamics, despite differences in their personal contexts. The recovery process unfolded progressively across seven stages of Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG): *challenges, automatic rumination, self-disclosure, social support, reduction of emotional distress, deliberate rumination, and post-traumatic growth* (O'Malley, 2023).

In the challenges phase, victims exhibited psychological reactions such as fear, hypervigilance, and loss of trust in others. The automatic rumination phase was characterized by intrusive, uncontrollable thoughts about the traumatic event. The transition to self-disclosure represented a crucial turning point, during which victims began expressing their emotions and experiences through prayer, trusted conversations, or counseling with campus task forces (Satgas PPKS).

Social support played a significant role in accelerating recovery. Participants who received emotional and practical support from family and friends showed faster reductions in emotional distress than those who faced social isolation. This finding aligns with PTG theory (Farida et al., 2023; Rosenthal et al., 2024), which emphasizes that supportive social relationships help survivors rediscover life's meaning and strengthen resilience.

In the final stage, participants demonstrated signs of positive transformation, including greater self-acceptance, spirituality, and optimism about the future. They no longer viewed the traumatic experience solely as a source of pain but as a transformative learning process that expanded self-awareness. These findings reinforce the concept that psychological recovery is not merely about erasing wounds but about reconstructing new, adaptive, and resilient meanings.

## 3. Integration of Hamemayu Hayuning Bawana Values in the Recovery Process

Ethnographic analysis indicated that the Hamemayu Hayuning Bawana (HHB) philosophy functions as a cultural coping mechanism relevant to sextortion survivors' recovery. Two core HHB values *Mangasah Mingising Budi* and *Memasuh Malaning Bumi* help survivors reconstruct traumatic experiences by cultivating harmony among thought, emotion, and action.

*Mangasah Mingising Budi* encourages victims to refine moral awareness, reflect on life experiences, and regulate negative emotions such as anger, shame, and guilt. Meanwhile, *Memasuh Malaning Bumi* guides individuals to cleanse themselves from past negativity and restore damaged social relationships. Both principles align with deliberate rumination in the PTG model, where individuals consciously reflect on traumatic experiences to construct new, constructive meaning (Shahabi et al., 2025).

These findings demonstrate that HHB is not merely a cultural heritage but a conceptual framework capable of strengthening psychotherapeutic processes rooted in local values. HHB integrates cognitive (*cipta*), affective (*rasa*), and behavioral (*karsa*) dimensions to restore inner balance. This aligns with Yordan et al. (2024), who describe HHB as an ethical and spiritual system emphasizing harmony among humans, society, and nature.

By merging PTG principles with HHB philosophy, this study proposes a culturally rooted conceptual model of trauma recovery in Indonesia. The model reveals that survivors' healing is not solely intrapsychic but grounded in moral and social values that enhance meaning and purpose. This underscores the importance of culturally responsive counseling, particularly in addressing gender-based and digital trauma.

#### 4. Synthesis of Findings and Discussion

Overall, the study reveals that sextortion trauma recovery is a multidimensional process encompassing psychological, social, and cultural aspects. While PTG explains intrapsychic transformations, HHB provides a cultural foundation that strengthens the spiritual and moral dimensions of recovery.

Integrating these two frameworks produces a conceptual model centered on meaning reconstruction as the core of healing. Survivors do not merely return to their pre-trauma state but experience growth in moral sensitivity, self-balance, and healthier relationships. Consequently, this study enriches multicultural counseling perspectives in Indonesia by bridging Western psychological theories with Javanese philosophical wisdom.

The findings confirm that sextortion in Indonesia not only causes legal and social harm but also inflicts complex and prolonged psychological wounds. Quantitative and qualitative results indicate strong trauma responses intrusion, avoidance, and hyperarousal as described in the IES-R framework. These symptoms point to emotional dysregulation and persistent threat perception, which, if untreated, may develop into post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Nevertheless, the results also demonstrate that some survivors possess the capacity not only to recover but to achieve positive transformation after trauma. This supports the Post-Traumatic Growth theory by Tedeschi and Calhoun, further reinforced by Farida et al. (2023), who suggest that individuals engaging in constructive reflection can enhance personal strength, deepen spirituality, and broaden life meaning. Thus, recovery is not merely psychological stabilization but a transformational process of finding meaning in suffering.

The qualitative findings illustrate that growth unfolds through seven non-linear stages, challenges, automatic rumination, self-disclosure, social support, emotional relief, deliberate rumination, and positive growth. Some individuals progress through these stages quickly, while others require more time. This resonates with Shahabi et al. (2025), who emphasize that differences in rumination levels and social support significantly shape recovery trajectories.

Social support emerged as a key catalyst. Victims who received emotional and practical support experienced faster emotional recovery than those facing isolation. This aligns with Rosenthal et al. (2024), who assert that post-trauma social

connectedness helps rebuild safety, trust, and a positive sense of identity. Social support facilitates self-disclosure and provides emotional validation essential for healing.

Moreover, HHB values were found to play a crucial role in reinforcing survivors' psychological recovery. *Mangasah Mingising Budi* promotes reflective processes and moral refinement as a form of cognitive restructuring, while *Memasuh Malaning Bumi* encourages active self-repair and social restoration consistent with deliberate rumination in PTG. Thus, HHB can be viewed as a cultural coping framework that balances cognitive, affective, and moral aspects in trauma healing.

The integration of PTG theory and HHB philosophy creates a new culturally embedded approach to understanding post-traumatic recovery in the Indonesian context. While PTG explains psychological empowerment through reflection and meaning-making, HHB contributes moral and spiritual guidance, directing healing toward inner harmony and social equilibrium. This perspective reinforces multicultural counseling frameworks proposed by Jati et al. (2022) and Yardan et al. (2024), which emphasize that local cultural values can function as ethical foundations for context-sensitive therapeutic practice.

In terms of practical implications, this study contributes to developing culturally attuned counseling models in Indonesia. First, it offers a conceptual foundation for creating HHB-based self-help modules for sextortion survivors to facilitate autonomous recovery. Second, the model can be applied within university counseling services, particularly in Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Task Forces (Satgas PPKS), to strengthen both curative and preventive interventions. Third, this study advances multicultural counseling research by positioning cultural values not merely as background elements but as active components shaping therapy and recovery processes.

However, the study acknowledges its limitations, particularly the small number of qualitative participants and the absence of male survivors, which restricts generalizability. Future studies should expand participant diversity and empirically test the integrated PTG–HHB model in broader interventions to assess its psychological effectiveness.

In summary, this research demonstrates that sextortion trauma recovery cannot be separated from the sociocultural context of survivors. Sustainable recovery requires the synergy of personal reflection, social support, and cultural values that nurture moral and spiritual balance. This approach shows that counseling rooted in local wisdom can provide a more humanistic, relevant, and transformative alternative for survivors of gender-based digital violence.

## Conclusion

This study concludes that sextortion is a form of gender- and technology-based violence that has significant psychological impacts on victims, particularly affecting their self-confidence, self-esteem, and emotional balance. Measurements using the Impact of Event Scale–Revised (IES-R) indicated that most victims experienced high levels of post-traumatic distress, especially in the avoidance and intrusion dimensions, reflecting efforts to avoid reminders and recurring memories of the traumatic event. However, the qualitative findings revealed the potential for positive post-traumatic growth (PTG), characterized by increased self-awareness, healthier social relationships, and deepened spirituality.

The integration of Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) and the Hamemayu Hayuning Bawana (HHB) philosophy provides a new understanding of recovery mechanisms rooted in local cultural values. PTG explains the intrapsychic dynamics of survivors through

reflection and meaning reconstruction, while HHB adds moral and spiritual dimensions that guide the recovery process toward inner and social harmony. Thus, psychological recovery among sextortion survivors extends beyond emotional healing to include strengthening life meaning and cultivating deep cultural awareness.

From a practical perspective, this study offers three key implications. First, in the context of counseling services, HHB values can serve as the foundation for developing a culturally responsive counseling model, integrating the Javanese principles of *cipta* (thought), *rasa* (feeling), and *karsa* (intention) with modern psychological approaches. This integration enables counselors to assist survivors in reconstructing traumatic experiences through moral and spiritual reflection that aligns with Javanese cultural contexts.

Second, at the institutional level, the study's findings can be implemented in university-based intervention programs through Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Task Forces (Satgas PPKS). The PTG-HHB-based module can serve as a guide for accompanying sextortion survivors to enhance self-awareness, self-acceptance, and psychological resilience.

Third, from a scholarly standpoint, this research contributes to the enrichment of multicultural counseling studies in Indonesia by integrating Western psychological theory with local cultural wisdom. This approach advances a more humanistic, contextual, and transformative paradigm of counseling.

Despite its contributions, the study acknowledges several limitations, particularly the small number of qualitative participants and the predominance of female respondents. Therefore, future research is recommended to involve more diverse participants across cultural and gender backgrounds and to empirically test the effectiveness of the PTG-HHB integrative model in experimental counseling practice.

Overall, this study reaffirms that the recovery of sextortion survivors requires a multidimensional approach that emphasizes not only psychological healing but also the reconstruction of life meaning through cultural and spiritual values. Local wisdom-based frameworks such as *Hamemayu Hayuning Bawana* have proven effective in enhancing psychological resilience and fostering new awareness that trauma can serve as a transformative path toward personal growth and holistic balance.

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