

# Students' characteristic contribution on personal boundaries in preventing the risk of sexual violence in faith-based boarding schools

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## Abstract

**Background:** Personal boundaries are important for establishing students' identity and defense mechanisms. Strong boundaries help students to recognize limits for interaction, while weak boundaries increase vulnerability for manipulation and sexual violence. In faith-based boarding schools where interactions are intensive, personal boundaries are crucial for preventing harassment.

**Purpose:** This study examines students' personal boundaries and the determining factors.

**Methods:** A quantitative cross-sectional design applied to 532 respondents recruited through proportionate random sampling from three Faith-Based Boarding Schools (secondary schools) in West Java. Data were collected using a set of questionnaires and were analyzed using the Chi-Square test and logistic regression.

**Results:** More than half respondent (52%) reported weak personal boundaries and among the identified characteristics only students' age (older) and gender (male) that identified significantly associated with strong personal boundaries ( $p$ -value < 0.05). Logistic regression identifies age as the most dominant factor, with each one-unit increase in age increasing the likelihood of personal boundaries by approximately 2.380 times.

**Conclusion:** More than half students have weak personal boundaries. Older and male students tend to have stronger boundaries. There is a critical need for greater awareness and education on personal rights and boundary-setting within these environments, particularly for new (younger) and female students.

**Keywords:** faith-based boarding school; perception; personal boundaries; risk of sexual violence

## Introduction

Personal boundaries are essential for maintaining mental, emotional, and social well-being. Clear boundaries help individuals distinguish their responsibilities, rights, and obligations from those of others. Without well-defined boundaries, individuals may experience stress, role confusion, and potential conflicts. Conceptually, boundaries regulate the interface between the self and others, shaping how individuals negotiate closeness, distance, responsibility, and identity within interpersonal and social systems. A comprehensive theoretical overview of personal boundaries requires integrating perspectives from psychodynamic theory, attachment theory, family systems theory, humanistic psychology, and contemporary relational and trauma-informed frameworks. Strong personal boundaries make

it easier for individuals to regulate physical and psychological interactions with others. Conversely, weak personal boundaries increase vulnerability to manipulation, abuse, and various forms of violence, including sexual violence (Schaeffer, 2018). In Faith-based Boarding Schools, where close-knit interactions are common, personal boundaries are crucial for preventing harassment. Understanding personal rights, body autonomy, and freedom of expression can help students establish clear boundaries in their interactions (Umar, 2020).

Faith-Based Boarding Schools are often regarded as safe and protected educational institutions. However, research indicates that closed environments, such as dormitories, may pose risks of sexual violence (Zayadi, 2020). The high level of daily interaction between students, teachers, and religious leaders can lead to power imbalances. Weak personal boundaries, coupled with misconceptions about sexual violence, may increase students' vulnerability to such violence (Davis & Farrell, 2019). This study examines how individual characteristics such as age, gender, education level, and cultural background affect the establishment of these boundaries in such a close-knit setting. Personal boundaries determine how individuals express themselves, set limits, maintain privacy, and regulate emotional and physical interactions (Petronio, 2002).

With increasing age, individuals gain more experience (e.g., work experience, interpersonal relationships, and life challenges). This enhanced experience strengthens self-awareness, allowing individuals to better determine when to enforce boundaries and when to be more open (Bigelow & Caskie, 2025; Diehl et al., 2021).

Another study shows that women tend to be more expressive in interpersonal relationships and more skilled in communication (Hall, 2006). In some cases, these advanced communication skills make it easier for women to negotiate their boundaries verbally. However, due to societal expectations of women as "nurturers," some may struggle to assert their need for personal space and may experience ambivalence between their own needs and the demands of empathy (Vogel et al., 2003).

Higher education typically increases an individual's exposure to psychological knowledge, legal rights, and social norms regarding personal boundaries, mental health, and personal rights (Riggio et al., 1991). Advanced education also enhances analytical and reflective skills, enabling individuals to evaluate and manage boundaries more effectively (Li et al., 2024).

Individuals from collectivist cultures (e.g., many Asian countries) generally prioritize group harmony and shared interests. As a result, personal boundaries in these cultures tend to be more flexible, as solidarity and togetherness are core values (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In societies with strong hierarchical values (e.g., where there are significant differences between younger and older

individuals or between superiors and subordinates), people may feel less free to set personal boundaries when interacting with those perceived to have higher status (Hofstede, 1991). Additionally, cultural norms regarding politeness may limit self-expression or outright rejection, requiring individuals to adjust how they enforce personal boundaries to align with local etiquette.

## Material and Methods

### Design

This study employs a quantitative, cross-sectional design to examine students' personal boundaries and further identify the contribution of students' characteristics (age, gender, education, and region) as determinants.

### Sample and setting

The sample comprised 532 respondents recruited through proportional random sampling from the total population of 2,660 students across three faith-based boarding schools in West Java. That sample size was determined using the Slovin formula with a margin of error of 0.038. Inclusion criteria included students enrolled for at least 1 year and who had provided informed consent.

### Variables

This study examines two main variables: students' personal boundaries over a specific period as the dependent variable, and students' characteristics (age, gender, education, and region of origin) as the independent variables.

### Instruments

The Personal Boundaries Questionnaire, adapted from (Cloud & Townsend, 2017), consisted of 10 questions measuring physical, emotional, and social boundaries on a 1-5 Likert scale. Demographic data included age, gender, educational level, and region. Instruments were tested for validity and reliability, yielding satisfactory results (item correlations > 0.30 and Cronbach's alpha > 0.70).

### Data collection

Data collection was conducted directly at each faith-based boarding school after first obtaining ethical approval from the Ethics Committee of Universitas Padjadjaran and permission from the schools. Before collecting the data, the researcher explained the study's purpose and objectives. After prospective participants understood the aims of the research and their rights as participants, the researcher asked for their willingness to take part in the study and to sign the informed consent form. For those who agree and sign the informed consent, a set of questionnaires is provided for completion and return to the researcher. All returned questionnaires are rechecked and asked to be completed if any incomplete answers are found.

### Data analysis

Data were analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21 (Field, 2018). Descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions and percentages, were used to summarize the sample's characteristics. The chi-square test was used to examine differences in characteristics and personal boundaries, while odds ratios (ORs) with 95% confidence intervals (CIs) were calculated to measure associations. A p-value of less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant. Multivariate logistic regression was performed to identify the most significant predictors.

### Ethical consideration

All respondents received an explanation of the research and data collection procedures, assurances of confidentiality, and confirmation that their participation was voluntary and free of coercion from any party. This study was approved by Universitas Padjadjaran Ethics Committee under code 221/UN6.KEP/EC/2024. Subsequently, the researcher completed all necessary pre-research procedures, including obtaining ethics committee approval, securing a research permit, and establishing collaborations with the relevant boarding schools and integrated service posts, ensuring participant protection, especially for those under 18 years of age.

### Result

The majority of respondents were in their late teens (70.3%), female (58.1%), and one-third (34%) were from the Bandung region. Regarding personal boundaries, more than half of the students (52%) exhibited weak personal boundaries (Table 1).

About Age, statistical tests indicate a significant relationship with personal boundaries ( $p=0.007$ ). Late teenagers group tend to have stronger boundaries (51.5%) than early teenagers (39.9%).

Late teenagers were 2.67 times more likely to exhibit stronger personal boundaries compared to early teenagers.

Regarding gender, it can be observed that there was a significant relationship ( $p=0.05$ ) and noted that male respondents tend to have stronger personal boundaries compared to females. Male respondents were 1.73 times more likely to exhibit stronger personal boundaries compared to females. However, in terms of students' education level and region of origin, statistical tests did not indicate a significant relationship between both variables and students' personal boundaries ( $p=0.169$  and  $p=0.199$  respectively).

Among the students' characteristics tested, only the age variable had significant partial effect in the model ( $p=0.007$ ).  $Y = -0.32 + 0.67 (\text{Age}) - 0.405 (\text{Education}) + 0.132 (\text{Region}) - 0.304 (\text{Sex})$ . The constant (-0.32) represents the logit value when all independent variables are equal to zero. Students' age ( $B = 0.67$ ,  $p = 0.007$ ) shows a statistically significant positive effect; means that each one-unit increase in student's age increases the odds of the dependent variable (students' personal boundaries) by approximately 2.380 times. In addition, student's sex ( $B = -0.304$ ,  $p = 0.05$ ) demonstrates a negative effect and lies exactly at the threshold of statistical significance ( $p \leq 0.05$ ). While student's level of education and region of origin were not statistically significant ( $p > 0.05$ ), indicating that their effects on the model were not robust for generalization.

### Discussion

Boundary Theory posits that individuals with strong personal boundaries are better able to recognize and avoid potentially harmful situations (Clark, 2000). In other words, personal boundaries serve as psychological and social protection, including in situations that may lead to sexual violence. Personal boundaries function as psychological and social

**Table 1. Characteristics of the respondents (n=532)**

Variable	Category	n	%
Education	Junior high school	209	39.3
	Senior high school	323	60.7
Age	Early teenagers	158	29.7
	Late teenagers	374	70.3
Gender	Male	223	41.9
	Female	309	58.1
Region of Origin	Garut	145	27.3
	Bandung	181	34.0
	Tasikmalaya	97	18.2
	Others	109	20.5
Personal Boundaries	Weak	255	52.0
	Strong	276	48.0

**Table 2. Association Between Students' Characteristics and Personal Boundaries**

Variable	Personal Boundaries				p-Value	AOR
	Weak		Strong			
	n	%	n	%		
<b>Education level</b>						
Junior High School	114	54.8	94	45.2	0.169	1.2
Senior High School	162	50.2	161	49.8		
<b>Age</b>						
Early teenagers	95	60.1	63	39.9	0.007	2.67
Late teenagers	181	48.5	192	51.5		
<b>Gender</b>						
Male	107	48	116	52	0.05	1.73
Female	169	54.9	139	45.1		
<b>Region</b>						
Garut	78	54.2	66	45.8	0.199	
Bandung	96	53	85	47		
Tasikmalaya	55	56.7	42	43.3		
Others	47	43.1	62	56.9		
<b>Total</b>	<b>276</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>255</b>	<b>48</b>		

**Table 3. Regression analysis**

Variable	B	SE	Sig.	Exp(B)	95 % CI	
					Lower	Upper
Age	0.67	0.322	0.007	2.380	1.265	4.477
Level Education	-0.405	0.303	0.181	0.667	0.369	1.207
Region	0.132	0.083	0.109	1.141	0.971	1.342
Sex	-0.304	0.178	0.05	0.738	0.520	1.047
Constant	-0.32	0.499	0.142	0.481		

protection, enabling individuals to establish physical, emotional, and social limits in relationships and reduce vulnerability to manipulation, exploitation, or sexual violence (Herman, 2022; Reid, 2026; Ryder & Bartle, 2026). Core aspects of healthy boundaries include the ability to refuse unwanted interactions, recognize risk, and respond to early warning signs of aggressive or invasive behavior.

In this study, respondents with a Senior High School education level appeared to exhibit stronger personal boundaries than those with Junior High School education; however, the statistical analysis did not indicate a significant relationship. While higher education may provide greater exposure to psychological knowledge, legal awareness, and boundary-setting resources (Li et al., 2022), these effects were not statistically significant in this sample. Thus, interpretations regarding the role of education should remain cautious.

Previous research has shown that weak personal boundaries are often associated with limited awareness of personal rights and safety, increasing vulnerability to sexual violence (Gomez-Pulido et al., 2024; Schneider & Hirsch, 2018). These findings highlight the need for educational

programs that emphasize personal boundary development across all levels of schooling. Integrating assertive communication, recognition of abuse, and boundary-setting into curricula can empower individuals with self-protection strategies and enhance awareness of personal rights, thereby contributing to the prevention of sexual violence from an early age (Barter et al., 2015; Bonar et al., 2022; Casey et al., 2020; Katz et al., 2023; Lavoie-Tremblay et al., 2022; WHO & UN Women, 2020).

The study's findings indicate a significant relationship between age and personal boundaries, highlighting the developmental nature of boundary-setting. As individuals mature, psychological and cognitive growth enhances their understanding and enforcement of personal limits. Adolescents and young adults are often in the "identity exploration" phase, during which personal boundaries remain flexible and are continually shaped by experiences and self-discovery (Luyckx et al., 2025). In contrast, older individuals typically possess a more stable self-concept, enabling them to maintain clearer, more consistent boundaries (Klimstra & Denissen, 2017). Furthermore, life experiences, including professional challenges, interpersonal relationships,

and personal adversities, foster self-awareness, enabling individuals to recognize when to assert boundaries and when to adapt them (London et al., 2023).

Interestingly, the study found no significant relationship between geographic region and personal boundaries, a result that diverges from previous research. For instance, (Luong et al., 2020) suggest that individuals from collectivist cultural backgrounds may exhibit more flexible boundaries, potentially affecting vulnerability to sexual violence. This discrepancy underscores the complexity of boundary development, which is not solely determined by cultural context but also by immediate social environments. Family support, early education, and guidance on boundary-setting are crucial factors that reinforce individuals' ability to protect themselves from harm. These findings highlight the importance of active involvement by parents and educators in fostering boundary awareness, emphasizing its role as a preventive strategy against sexual violence (Moiseeva et al., 2020).

The findings of this study highlight a significant relationship between gender and personal boundaries, indicating that women are more likely to exhibit weaker personal boundaries, which can increase their vulnerability to sexual violence. While women generally demonstrate strong interpersonal communication skills and emotional expressiveness (Hall et al., 2016), these traits do not always translate into the effective assertion of personal boundaries. Social expectations that emphasize nurturing and empathetic behaviors may create internal conflicts, leading women to feel pressure to prioritize others' needs over their own personal space, thereby compromising their ability to set boundaries (Folberg et al., 2022).

Weak personal boundaries have been linked to increased susceptibility to privacy violations, manipulation, and exploitation. Research shows that individuals who struggle to establish or maintain clear boundaries are more likely to become victims of sexual violence (Linehan & Wilks, 2015). This underscores the importance of interventions designed to strengthen personal boundaries, particularly for vulnerable populations such as children, adolescents, and individuals experiencing mental health challenges. Comprehensive approaches including assertiveness training, sexuality education, and psychological counselling can enhance individuals' capacity to recognize, communicate, and maintain their boundaries in interpersonal relationships (Lindon & Webb, 2016).

Furthermore, persistent social norms that reinforce gender inequality exacerbate women's challenges in maintaining personal boundaries, further increasing their risk of victimization (Dixit, 2023). By promoting education, empowerment, and interpersonal skills development, women can be better equipped to navigate social pressures while protecting their personal space. Such strategies are

essential not only for individual safety but also for fostering a broader culture of respect and boundary awareness.

Personal boundaries are shaped by a complex interplay of psychological, social, and cultural factors. Early-life experiences, including parenting styles and childhood trauma, play a critical role in boundary development. Traumatic experiences such as abuse, neglect, or family instability can disrupt attachment processes, often leading to difficulties in establishing and maintaining boundaries later in life (Fulgieri, 2025; Quan et al., 2024). Individuals with a history of trauma may struggle with asserting boundaries due to fears of conflict, abandonment, or discomfort in interpersonal relationships. Complementing these early influences, self-esteem and self-concept are fundamental in boundary-setting. High self-esteem empowers individuals to express discomfort and decline unwanted interactions assertively, while a well-defined self-concept helps them recognize personal needs and limits. Conversely, individuals with low self-concept may be more susceptible to external pressures or hesitant to voice concerns (Wang et al., 2025; Yang et al., 2025).

Emotional intelligence further supports effective boundary management by enabling individuals to understand and regulate their own emotions while recognizing those of others (Chernata, 2024). Individuals with high emotional intelligence are better able to detect threats or discomfort and communicate their needs clearly (Franco et al., 2025). Cultural context also significantly impacts boundary-setting. In collectivist cultures, which prioritize group harmony, asserting personal boundaries may be perceived as selfish, creating barriers to boundary enforcement. In contrast, individualistic cultures encourage personal autonomy and validate the importance of maintaining clear boundaries (Jiao & Zhao, 2023; Klein et al., 2024).

Family dynamics and social environments further influence how boundaries are formed and maintained. Families that model open communication and mutual respect help children develop a strong sense of personal limits (Thasneem, 2025). Similarly, supportive peer networks reinforce boundary recognition, whereas environments that tolerate boundary violations, such as bullying, can weaken an individual's capacity to assert their limits (Hoffman et al., 2021). Finally, attachment style plays a critical role in shaping boundary behaviors. Securely attached individuals can maintain boundaries without guilt or fear of rejection, whereas those with anxious attachment may exhibit overly flexible boundaries, and those with avoidant attachment may engage in excessive boundary enforcement to avoid intimacy (Fraleley et al., 2021; Sagone et al., 2023). Collectively, these findings underscore that personal boundaries are not static traits but dynamic skills influenced by multiple interrelated factors across the lifespan.

The findings of this study highlight the multifaceted

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nature of personal boundaries, demonstrating how psychological and demographic factors interact to shape individuals' ability to establish and maintain them. Psychological maturity, characterized by the capacity for self-reflection, recognition of personal strengths and weaknesses, and responsibility for one's emotions and actions, plays a critical role in boundary-setting (Gardner et al., 2020). Individuals with higher self-awareness are more attuned to situations that necessitate asserting or negotiating boundaries, while assertive communication skills enable them to express needs and discomforts effectively without aggression or passivity (Hanks, 2016; Megele & Longfield, 2017). In contrast, maladaptive communication patterns, such as passive-aggressiveness or excessive aggression, can undermine the development of healthy personal boundaries (Hamilton et al., 2021).

Among the variables examined, age emerged as the strongest predictor of personal boundaries, with the highest coefficient (0.526) in the logistic regression analysis. This suggests that as individuals grow older, they are more likely to have clear, robust personal boundaries. With age comes accumulated social, emotional, and life experiences that enhance one's ability to set and maintain boundaries (Kuther, 2018). Emotional and psychological maturity further supports this process by facilitating stable emotional regulation and thoughtful negotiation of personal needs (Soto et al., 2016). Moreover, at different life stages, individuals tend to prioritize personal well-being and become selective in social relationships, further reinforcing boundary-setting behaviors (Lachman et al., 2015). These insights are particularly valuable for practitioners, educators, and counsellors, as they suggest that interventions to strengthen personal boundaries may need to be tailored according to developmental stages.

The study also identified that region of origin, whether urban or rural, has a modest effect on personal boundaries, highlighting the influence of cultural and environmental contexts (Crozet, 2022). This underscores the importance of context-specific approaches when designing programs or interventions to enhance boundary awareness and skills. Additionally, the negative coefficient for gender suggests that men and women differ in the likelihood of forming personal boundaries, with male respondents demonstrating stronger boundaries. These gender differences warrant further qualitative exploration to understand how social norms, patriarchal culture, and other biopsychosocial factors shape boundary-related behaviors.

### Nursing implication

This study holds vital implications toward nursing practices and nursing research. Practically, the weak students' personal boundaries found in this study indicated that any program to enhance students' personal boundaries are very important. Particularly, in the early stage/new students. Additionally, this study only covers some students'

characteristic potentially contribute to the personal boundaries. There are other factors such as personality traits, socioeconomic status, and past trauma may also play significant roles (Kamene, 2025). Future research should therefore incorporate these additional variables to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay of determinants influencing personal boundaries.

### Conclusion

There is a significant relationship between students' age and gender with the students' personal boundaries, where older students and male tend to have stronger personal boundaries. Students' age identified as the most contributing factors to the students' personal boundaries. Education level and region of origin do not significantly impact these boundaries. These findings emphasize the importance for the faith-based boarding school to develop strategies fostering strong students' personal boundaries, particularly for new (younger) and female students through tailoring educational programs to mitigate the risk of sexual violence in school.

### Declaration of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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### Data Availability

The datasets generated during and analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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