Child grooming: Sex education as a preventive solution

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Abstract: Child grooming is sexual, psychological, and physical violence that has now been integrated and mutated with digital technology. Cases of child abuse are of particular concern because they have a long-term impact on children's development. This research was carried out to provide answers regarding preventive approaches or efforts that can be taken to overcome the phenomenon of child grooming. This research was carried out qualitatively using a phenomenological approach. Data was collected through interviews, observation, and documentation. The data analysis technique was carried out using the Mills & Huberman technique. The validity of this research data applies source triangulation techniques. The results of the research show that child grooming in the form of sexual harassment is more susceptible to girls due to the way they dress less in line with their age, while for boys, it is caused by the physical deficiencies they experience. This research found that there is a need for holistic sex education through approaches to children, parents, teachers, and the social environment in which children live.
Keywords: Child abuse cases; child grooming; sex education

Introduction

Cases of abuse and violence against minors in psychological terms are known as child grooming. Based on data traced by researchers, it is known that the National Commission for Child Protection received 3,547 complaints of violence against children throughout 2023, of which cases occurred in sexual violence with 1,915 cases, physical violence with 985 cases, and psychological violence with 674 cases (Muhamad, 2023). Cases of sexual, physical, and psychological violence are essential to pay attention to because they will have an impact on the child's future development. In research conducted by (Sitaniapessy and Pati, 2022), it was explained that victims of child grooming, or what is known as grooming, often experience emotional stress and trauma. Psychological victims of grooming will experience deep feelings of guilt, shame, and anxiety because of the manipulation they experienced. Apart from that, research conducted by Munir (2018) found that victims of grooming can develop PTSD.

The two studies above are one of the many pieces of evidence that child grooming is a severe problem and requires preventive action to avoid it from happening. One way to avoid child grooming is through proper sex education. Sex education is an educational process that aims to provide the information, understanding, and skills necessary for individuals to develop a healthy, positive, and responsible understanding of human sexuality. Sex education aims to help individuals, especially teenagers and young adults, understand comprehensively the body, reproduction, interpersonal relationships, safe sexual behaviour, as well as rights and responsibilities in a sexual context (Zubaidah et al., 2023). These efforts can help children recognize inappropriate behaviour and how to report it, as well as help them understand their rights and how to protect themselves.

Sex education is critical because currently, child grooming has mutated, not only being done offline but also happening online. This phenomenon occurs due to the development of human civilization, accompanied by the development of ways of conveying information in

communication, known as information and communication technology. The emergence of online child grooming is an exciting study because it turns out that violence can also occur indirectly. In this context, child grooming itself is also a process in which someone takes steps to build trust and relationships with children to seek sexual gain or use the child for other purposes (Nurlia & Priyana, 2022). A concrete example of online child grooming is cases of sexual crimes via social media, namely video call sex (VCS) against children and teenagers. Four underage girls were victims of online sexual crimes by the suspect with the initials FAS, a 27-year-old man. Three ten-year-old children said FAS contacted them via WhatsApp and asked them to make a video call. These children were shown the suspect's genitals, and then the victims felt very shocked and turned off the phone. While crying, these children told their parents (Santoso & Yasir, 2022)

Departing from the case above, some research regarding child grooming among children is still limited to direct research, namely research carried out by Ningsih & Hennyati (2018), which focuses on sexual violence against children in Karawang Regency; then research carried out by Septiani (2021), which focuses on family communication for the prevention of sexual violence, as well as a scientific article written by Hasiana (2020), which focuses on the role of parents in early childhood sexual education. From several of these studies, we have not yet found a focus on how to prevent or preventive efforts to overcome child grooming that occurs online, even though currently, child grooming has penetrated and integrated with technology. Therefore, this research wants to find out what kind of preventive efforts can be carried out or have been implemented to overcome the problem of child grooming.

Meanwhile, several relevant studies were also found, namely research conducted by Wahyuningtyas and Mufid (2022). This research discusses the role of Techno Preventive as an effort to prevent cases of child grooming in society. This research is more of a normative juridical approach by relying on the criminal system in Indonesia itself to avoid grooming child cases. The difference between this research and the research conducted this time lies in its efforts to prevent instances of sexual harassment, namely Techno Preventive and Sex Education. Relevant research was also conducted by Lase et al. (2022). This research also prioritizes the education process for children regarding the dangers of child grooming; this is almost similar to the research carried out this time, only this time the research focuses more on sex education so that education related to child grooming is also included in this effort, only it is further developed based on sex education carried out on children.

Method

The research method used in this research is qualitative with a phenomenological approach (Sugiyono, 2017). This type and approach is considered suitable for explaining the phenomenon of child grooming in individual children. The data collection techniques for this research were carried out using three methods, which are in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and documentation. Interviews were conducted with three parents: Mr. DS, Mrs. RR, and Mrs. DT. Meanwhile, the secondary source interviews were the children of the three parents who experienced cases of online sexual and psychological harassment, namely YT, HR, and GG. The collected data was then processed using Mills & Huberman data analysis

techniques: reduction, data presentation, and conclusion (Azwar, 2017). The validity of this research data applies source triangulation techniques, specifically checking from two different sources. If there are similarities, the validity of the qualitative data can be established (Bachri, 2010).

Results and Discussion

Results

Child grooming is behaviour carried out by adults in committing sexual violence against children, which has now mutated and been integrated with technology so that violence can occur online. This behaviour is immoral, so those who violate it will face the consequences. In Indonesia, cases of sexual and psychological violence against children are regulated by law, namely Law Number 23 of 2002 concerning Child Protection, where in this law, there is a legal basis for protecting children from all forms of violence, including sexual and psychological violence. In the data traced by researchers, it is known that from January 1, 2024, until now, sexual and psychological violence against children in Indonesia has become a boiling issue. The following is a picture presentation:

Figure 1. Data on Types of Violence
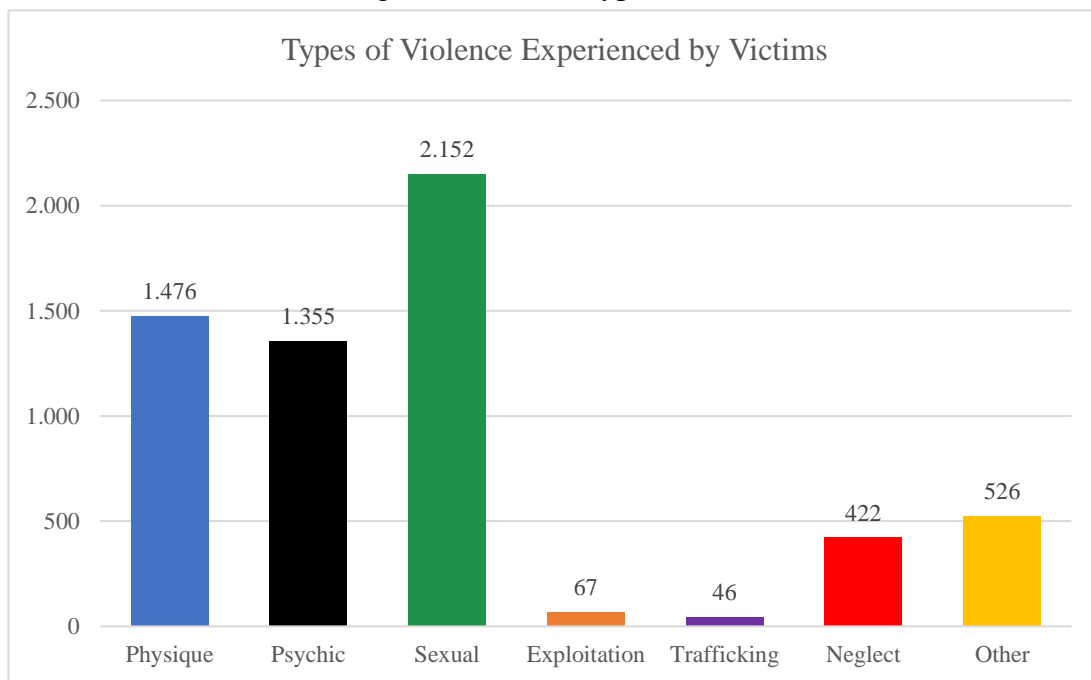
Based on the data above, it is known that sexual violence is the case in first place with a total of 2,152 cases as of January 1, 2024, then in second place, followed by cases of physical violence with 1,476 cases as of January 1, 2024, and in third position followed by cases of psychological violence with 1,355 cases as of January 1, 2024. Based on this data, it can be interpreted that cases of sexual violence are a significant concern for children, so intervention or preventive efforts are needed that are carried out holistically both from the school, family, and environmental domains. One of the victims of child grooming in the form of online sexual violence was the incident experienced by YT and HR. In the interview session conducted with his parents, namely Mrs RR, it was discovered that YT had been playing on

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Facebook, so he got to know more mature people and was invited to video call sex. In the interview with Mrs RR, it was discovered that:

"My daughter started to get to know the suspect through Facebook, she was invited to a video call for sex, because she was shocked she reported it to me; I think this is my fault for not monitoring and controlling my child's smartphone use."

From the interview excerpt above, it is known that parental control is significant in the current digital era; research findings also reinforce this carried out by Lewoleba & Fahrozi (2020), who say that parental control in using smartphones is significant to prevent child grooming behaviour. In an interview conducted by a child named YT, it was also discovered that he had received this online child grooming behaviour several times with different people. In the interview session, YT admitted that:

"I was invited to video call several times by adult men, and I was shown their genitals."

From the interview excerpt above, it is known that YT has experienced child grooming behaviour not just once but several times; because of this, profound control is needed both from the family and the environment around where YT lives. Apart from YT, the child victim of online grooming, namely HR, admitted the same thing:

"I was shown a genital via video call by an adult man I had just met, he asked me to take off my clothes, I felt very scared, and I reported it to my father."

From the interview excerpt above, it is also known that HR's parental control is minimal in HR's social media consumption; this is because HR's parents all work and sometimes let HR play on their smartphones until it is late. The results of observations carried out for one year on two children, namely YT and HR, later strengthened the results of the interview; these two girls, namely HR and YT, have fashion styles that exceed their age limits; they are still children, but the clothes they wear are unlike children. High school with a tank top or hot pants; this then triggers child grooming perpetrators to carry out their actions. So, there needs to be an understanding for parents to pay attention to how their children dress.

Unlike girls, a boy named GG was not the victim of online grooming in the form of sexual harassment. However, GG experienced grooming in the form of online psychological violence where an interview session with GG revealed that:

"I was reviled for having physical deficiencies by several people I do not know"

"I also often get threatened if I do not comply with people who suddenly send messages on Instagram."

The interview results above are reinforced by observations that found that GG did not interact much and tended to close himself off from the environment. Physically, GG was physically disabled due to an accident he experienced when he was a toddler. Mr DS, namely GG's parents, revealed that:

"Sometimes I feel sorry for my child; he does not have any friends either online or offline; that is why I sometimes come home from work early so that GG has someone to play with."

Based on the interview excerpt above, it is known that GG's parents' attention is excellent, so the grooming that occurs to him offline and online can be minimized quite well. However, several things need to be paid attention to because the period experienced by GG is a period of playing and learning, so a supportive environment is needed. These stages are to develop further and maximize their potential. The environment has a huge role in children's

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development (Mansur, 2017). Therefore, GG's parents must consider this for the sake of GG's sustainability and mental health.

Discussion

Child grooming is definitively a behaviour of sexual, physical, or psychological violence, which is a process or particular way of approaching children with specific goals (Salamor et al., 2020). Child grooming is a form of sexual, psychological, or physical exploitation in which adults establish an emotional or physical relationship; this is a severe crime that can have a long-term impact on the emotional, physical, and mental well-being of grooming victims.

Currently, child grooming has transformed into an online form where perpetrators can also use social media, online applications, or other online platforms to communicate with children and build relationships. Therefore, parents and caregivers must control their children's smartphone use. In research conducted by Sugiarti & Andyanto (2022), it is explained that parental control must be carried out periodically; parents can also use the smartphone feature, namely "parental control," so that parents understand their children's digital consumption; this is important to do correctly—parenting training in the digital era. A deep understanding of children's internet access and content consumption for parents will help provide a comprehensive understanding and is an effort to prevent child grooming. Apart from carrying out parenting outreach actions, there is also a need to provide outreach regarding how children dress; many children currently wear clothes not in accordance with their age (Hikmah, 2017), which gives rise to bad intentions, and child grooming is no exception.

However, child grooming has occurred and children who are victims of grooming need support and therapy to help them overcome the trauma and heal (Holivia & Suratman, 2021). After all, preventive measures can be taken because several factors can trigger child grooming in victims. One of them is the lack of parental supervision of children. One of the most vulnerable media for spreading child grooming cases today is through social media networks and several other online methods. The perpetrator carried out the grooming action via social media, starting with seducing the victim in order to gain the victim's trust. All the methods used by the perpetrator are solely to gain access to the victim so that the perpetrator can easily carry out sexual harassment against the victim (Andaru, 2021).

The next most fundamental factor in child grooming cases is the presence of sexual disorders or deviations possessed by the perpetrator. In other words, the perpetrator does have a fetish or sexual desire for children. So, it can be concluded that this is the main driving force behind the perpetrator's actions; this is included in the category of sexual deviation, which can be cured with regular therapy.

Regarding fetishes, there is one fetish that has a tendency towards small children or what is called Pedophilia. Pedophilia is a word that comes from the Greek Pedophilia, which means a behavioral disorder in a person, namely sexual deviant behavior; usually, someone who suffers from Pedophilia will like children as their target. Pedophilia is a disorder of continuous sexual desire towards teenagers or young children, who are usually under 14 years

of age or younger (Cahyono et al., 2018); this can also be said to be one of the factors that have the highest percentage of causes of child grooming behaviour.

However, child grooming behaviour does not mean that it cannot be prevented at all because this can be prosecuted based on applicable legal provisions, such as child protection laws, immoral crimes, and ITE laws. Nevertheless, all of this will have no results if the children themselves are not given proper education regarding child grooming cases. One solution to this problem can be overcome by providing sex education to children and their parents (Suendra & Mulyawati, 2020). Education is crucial for increasing a person's insight (Mauliyana et al., 2022). Therefore, sex education itself is an activity carried out by the community to educate and provide information regarding sexual matters in society. Sex education itself covers many things, including sexual health, sexual behaviour, and many more (Margaretta & Kristyaningsih, 2020).

The role of sexual education itself in preventing child grooming behaviour is considered quite important, one of which is providing information regarding how dangerous this behaviour is for the survival of children. So parents also have to provide extra supervision of their children and need more information regarding the magnitude of the negative impacts produced by child grooming behaviour (Ratnasari & Solehuddin, 2022).

Sex education itself can be carried out in various ways; in several known studies, it can be carried out through socialization activities in schools. In research conducted by Sihite (2023), it is explained that legal education about sexual harassment will create an understanding that children will report all forms of crime, especially sexual harassment (child grooming). Apart from that, research conducted by Insiyah and Hidayat (2020) explains the importance of parental communication regarding child grooming. This socialization is carried out by synergizing the school and teachers with parents or guardians of students.

Apart from that, sex education can provide information regarding the characteristics of the perpetrator who will act, as well as carrying out early detection to gather information about who the communication partner is and their intentions. Then, study the signs of children who have become victims so that follow-up can be carried out as quickly as possible (Anwar & Alfina, 2021).

Sex education itself is still categorized as a means of providing information to the public. The issue of implementation is returned to the community itself, especially to the parents of children whose children have been victims of child grooming or who have never been, with the aim that parents can intervene with their children to make them better. One intervention that is suitable for post-sex education is to carry out rehabilitation and psychological therapy for children who have become victims of child grooming.

Howsoever, according to research conducted by Fitria (2017), it is explained that sex education will not be optimal if there is no integration from the environment, such as parents, school, and place of residence. Therefore, a holistic approach is needed to provide an understanding of child grooming for children, parents, and the social environment in which children live. Research conducted by Nurbaiti et al. (2022) also states this, or in other words, integration is needed to maximize sex education for children to overcome child grooming. One of the concrete efforts made can be found in an article by Sasono et al. (2022), which explains that learning materials that include sex education for children are needed.

Conclusions

Strict control and supervision from parents regarding children's use of social media and the internet are significant; this can help prevent online grooming behaviour and protect children from potential exploitation. Comprehensive sexual education needs to be given to children and parents; this includes understanding the risks of grooming, early detection of signs of grooming, and how to report and resolve the situation. The social environment in which children live also has a vital role in protecting them from violence and exploitation. Integration between family, school, and community in providing understanding and protection to children is essential. Therefore, the right advice for preventive child grooming efforts is a holistic and integrated approach from various parties, including sex education in schools, parental communication, and understanding of the social environment, which is needed to provide maximum protection to children.

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