

# Online Grooming Threatens Women on Social Media

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Celebrating its 30th Anniversary, UGM Center for Women Studies held a series of webinars that discussed several topics centered around online gender-based violence (GBV) on 6-7 March 2021. The first webinar talked about Love Scam, and the second focused on Online Grooming, a form of violence that was most reported in Indonesia over the past years.

Online gender-based violence was considered a new form of violence against women. As Siti Aminah Tardi explained, Head of the Sub-division for Law and Policy Reform of National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan), the term was initially introduced in 2017 by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Over the years, the number of cases reported regarding this model of violence has gradually increased. Komnas Perempuan recorded a significant rise in reports from only 16 in 2017 to 942 in 2020. Generally, cyber violence against women includes stalking, sexting, hacking, malicious distribution, insults, online defamation, cloning (identity falsification, non-consensual pornography (revenge porn)), and online grooming.

According to her, malicious distribution and online grooming are the two most reported cases in Indonesia. As these are considered new, many victims have yet to understand that such is violence



against them. As soon as they know, reports begin to increase.

Dr. Budi Wahyuni, a Former Deputy Chairperson of Komnas Perempuan for the 2015-2019 period, explained that online grooming aimed to convince a victim to immediately send photos or videos of sexual attributes to the perpetrator(s) through personal messages on social media. These people could be someone within the victim's circle or strangers. They could masquerade as someone the victim knew by cloning an account/profile picture. Or, those were strangers who were trying to get close to the victim.

"They manipulate victims through emotional bonds. Initially, it started from just greeting each other, then continued with exchanging personal information. The victim is flattered by the attention and intensity of the perpetrator. It makes the victim fantasize and be dependent on the perpetrator," she explained.

After succeeding in manipulating the victim, the perpetrator would start a conversation revolving around sexuality. The perpetrator would use sentences that somehow challenge and trigger the victim to fulfill the request and feel insecure.

According to Budi, online grooming can occur for several reasons. First, there is a lack of information about sexuality and reproductive health. Next, there is a tendency of the victims to believe in the myths about these things. The unequal gender construction makes women sexual objects. Power relations also make it difficult for women to get out of their problems. As the victims of revictimization, women are constructed as the ones at fault, forced to believe that everything happens because of their inability to protect themselves. These result in women losing their courage to report violence, especially if asked about evidence.

Budi emphasized that violence could happen to any woman. Sexuality includes being socially free from stigma. Thus, correct education about sexuality and reproductive organs is necessary.

"Sex and reproductive organs education aim to enlighten and empower, not to scare. Women need autonomy over their bodies which is part of women's human rights or women's sexual and reproductive health rights. Every citizen deserves the right of receiving this kind of education," she concluded.

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