

The dynamics of online sexual grooming: From comfort to insecurity in victims' experiences

Nanda Audia Vrisaba*¹, Mutimmatul Faidah², Iman Pasu Marganda Hadiarto Purba³

¹Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Indonesia

²Faculty of Engineering, Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Indonesia

³Faculty of Social and Politic Science, Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Indonesia

*Corresponding author email: nandavrisaba@unesa.ac.id

Article History:	Submission	Revised:	Accepted	Published
	2024-11-17	2024-12-24	2024-12-26	2024-12-28

ABSTRACT

The prevalence of sexual violence has been rising, particularly with the increasing reports of online sexual abuse. This study aims to examine the experiences of victims subjected to online sexual grooming, a form of sexual violence occurring in digital spaces. The research focuses on the manipulative tactics employed by perpetrators to exploit their victims. Using a qualitative approach and a phenomenological study design, the research involved two participants who had been victims of online sexual grooming by unknown perpetrators, with no prior face-to-face contact. Data were collected through interviews, and analysis followed the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Findings reveal that prior to the grooming process, participants encountered the perpetrators via social media and engaged in frequent conversations. Throughout the grooming process, perpetrators employed various manipulative techniques such as conversational manipulation, sustained contact, secrecy, sexualization, compliments, erratic moods, and other grooming behaviors. The emotional impact of online sexual grooming on the victims included both positive and negative feelings, with the latter predominating during the grooming experience.

Keywords: emotional impact, manipulation tactics, online sexual grooming, social media, victims

This is an open access article under the [CC BY-SA](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/) license.



Article citation:

Vrisaba, N. A., Faidah, M., Purba, I. P. M. H. (2024). The dynamics of online sexual grooming: From comfort to insecurity in victims' experiences. *EMPATHY: Jurnal Fakultas Psikologi*, 7(2), 127-147. <https://doi.org/10.12928/empathy.v7i2.30328>

INTRODUCTION

Cybercrime has become an increasingly frequent and concerning issue, with online sexual violence emerging as a particularly prevalent form. While offline sexual violence continues to occur, data from CATAHU by the Indonesian National Commission on Violence Against Women (KOMNAS Perempuan) reveals a significant rise in Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV). In 2019, there were 241 reported cases of OGBV, a figure

that sharply increased to 940 cases in 2020. This escalating trend in gender-based violence (GBV) requires urgent attention from all stakeholders. The advent of the internet and the widespread use of social media have drastically transformed the landscape of sexual violence, making it more complex and difficult to address. KOMNAS Perempuan also highlights that GBV in the digital sphere has increasingly intricate patterns, where perpetrators are often difficult to detect, and existing legal protections under Indonesia's Electronic Information and Transaction Law (UU ITE) remain inadequate to effectively tackle these crimes [1]. Online sexual violence can manifest in various forms, including cyber harassment, cyber grooming, hacking, privacy violations, malicious content distribution, revenge porn, impersonation, defamation, and online recruitment for exploitative purposes. Furthermore, perpetrators have also been found to engage in grooming through online gaming platforms [2], [3].

The rise of electronic sexual violence is particularly concerning in an era of rapid digital development. Social media has become a common platform for individuals to interact and form relationships online. CATAHU data from KOMNAS Perempuan in 2022 recorded 549 cases of electronic-based sexual violence committed by ex-boyfriends and 230 cases committed by current boyfriends. The types of sexual violence reported include extortion, revenge porn (the distribution of explicit content as a form of retaliation), and the sharing of sexual content without the victim's consent [5]. Other forms of cyber sexual violence include threats to share explicit images or videos, verbal abuse, humiliation, body shaming, cyber grooming, privacy invasion, defamation, and the dissemination of illegal content [6]. The majority of victims of online sexual violence are individuals aged 18-25, primarily students. Data from the PPKS Task Force at a university in 2023 revealed that nearly 75% of reported cases of cyber sexual violence involved online sexual grooming [7].

Several factors have contributed to the increase in cyber sexual violence, one of which is the misperception of gender roles between men and women. In particular, patriarchal culture tends to view women as weak, passive, and submissive, which may encourage individuals to engage in harmful actions toward women, such as sexual violence, rape, domestic abuse, and exploitation [7], [8]. Another contributing factor is the insufficient protection of personal data, which can lead to its misuse for committing various forms of violence. One common misuse is the use of personal data as a tool for blackmail or threats

[9]. Furthermore, the rise in cyber sexual violence can also be attributed to a lack of understanding and awareness, both among victims and perpetrators, regarding the various forms of sexual violence. Additionally, the legal system and policies are often perceived as inadequate in supporting prevention, assistance, recovery, and in addressing victim-blaming stereotypes [9].

The concept of "grooming" was first introduced in UK law in Section 15 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003, which allowed for the prosecution of individuals preparing for child abuse. Legislative progress has since enabled the legal system to target perpetrators of grooming activities [10], [11]. Grooming refers to the process by which an individual prepares a child, an influential adult, and the surrounding environment for abuse, with the specific intent of gaining access to the child, ensuring compliance, and maintaining confidentiality of the abuse [12]. This process strengthens the pattern of violence perpetrated, as the perpetrator can use it to justify or deny their actions. According to the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), grooming involves building relationships, trust, and emotional connections with the target, typically a child or adolescent, in order to manipulate, exploit, and abuse them [2]. Although there is no universally accepted definition of grooming, the concept remains critical in understanding the dynamics of online sexual violence.

Grooming is no longer restricted to children or teenagers; it can also occur between perpetrators and any individual they choose as their target or victim. Perpetrators who engage in online grooming often have distinct objectives compared to those involved in offline grooming. Online grooming may be driven by fantasies, where the perpetrator seeks to obtain sexual content or footage from the victim for personal use or dissemination for personal gain [12]. Alternatively, it can be driven by the desire for contact, where the perpetrator aims to gain indirect access to the victim for the purpose of committing sexual violence [13]. Online grooming is a process in which an individual manipulates their target through the internet with the intention of perpetrating sexual violence [13–15]. Perpetrators typically target victims who are in vulnerable circumstances, such as those seeking attention or affection, those with troubled family relationships, or those searching for companionship [16]. This grooming process may involve inviting the victim to engage in sexualized conversations or sharing sexualized content, and it often entails complex psychological manipulation that may span several days or longer [17]. Through these manipulation

techniques, perpetrators attempt to create, view, and share sexualized content without any direct physical contact with the victim [12, 18].

Grooming perpetrators typically employ specific techniques or methods to control their victims. If the perpetrator is skilled in grooming, the victim may unknowingly fall under their influence and control. It can be concluded that the more proficient and experienced a perpetrator is at grooming—ranging from selecting, connecting, and seducing the victim—the more successful the grooming process is likely to be. Successful grooming involves manipulating the victim to the point where sexual violence becomes easier to carry out without detection [19]. Common strategies used by perpetrators include: (1) employing a range of manipulation and control techniques; (2) identifying the victim's vulnerabilities; (3) utilizing various interpersonal and social environments; (4) building trust and normalizing sexualized behavior; and (5) ultimately aiming to exploit the victim [20]. In the context of online sexual grooming, perpetrators emphasize the need to establish an emotional connection with the victim through online interactions to facilitate future sexual abuse [12].

The strategies used by perpetrators to ensnare their targets in these harmful relationships may include various forms of deception, such as fabricating personal details (e.g., identity, interests, hobbies), expressing interest in the victim's life, offering gifts or resources (such as money, food, jokes, or photos), gradually introducing sexual content, and escalating to explicit threats or blackmail [21]. The primary goal of grooming is to establish trust, closeness, and intimacy with the victim. The anonymity afforded by social media allows perpetrators to feel protected, using this anonymity as a shield to carry out their crimes [22]. Additionally, the approach a perpetrator takes toward their target follows a series of stages, which typically include: (1) selecting a victim; (2) gaining access to and isolating the victim; (3) building trust; (4) desexualizing sexual content and physical contact; and (5) post-harassment care [19].

When executing manipulation techniques, perpetrators often employ a combination of both physical and psychological methods to harass their victims [23]. Psychological grooming is typically used at the beginning to establish a relationship and build trust, creating a sense of comfort for the victim. Physical grooming, on the other hand, involves actions that cross personal boundaries, such as initiating sexual conversations or exposing oneself to the victim [24]. Perpetrators may also combine tactics such as offering flattery,

blackmail, threats, sexual games, and bribery to further manipulate and control their victims [25].

Several studies outline the grooming process in a sequential manner, starting with the formation of a friendship, progressing to the development of a relationship, and involving the perpetrator's risk assessment, which evaluates the victim's vulnerabilities. This is followed by exclusivity through intense communication, attention, mutual respect, and ultimately, the introduction of sexual activities and fantasies [26]. Victims often experience five key stages during the grooming process: (1) the feeling that something is lacking in their life; (2) perceiving themselves as important to someone they are connected with online; (3) becoming more deeply entangled in the online network, making it difficult to disconnect; (4) involvement of others; and (5) attempts to cut off contact with the perpetrator [25].

The effects of sexual violence resulting from online grooming can be severely detrimental to survivors. Victims of online grooming often face significant mental health challenges, including (1) difficulties or avoidance in forming relationships; (2) depression; (3) feelings of hopelessness; (4) self-harm; and (5) experiences of shame, guilt, and humiliation [18], [27], [28]. Other studies highlight various psychological consequences for survivors, such as feelings of shame, flashbacks to the perpetrator, self-harm, diminished trust, and aggression. However, some survivors report positive outcomes, such as increased family support and greater protection from family members [11], [14], [29]. Another impact of victimization is that survivors may tend to blame themselves for the sexual violence they experienced, leading to prolonged fear, trauma, and intrusive memories. This victimization often affects how individuals perceive themselves within their social relationships, resulting in a distorted self-image [30].

Internet crimes, particularly those related to online sexual grooming, are increasingly dominating media coverage and raising concerns among the public [31]. It is essential to further enhance our understanding of online sexual grooming to identify the key characteristics involved in this form of crime, both from the perspectives of the perpetrators and the victims [11]. This study aims to gain deeper insight into the experiences of survivors of online sexual grooming, which is crucial to understanding what victims endure. Gaining knowledge of the dynamics faced by victims will offer valuable perspectives, increasing the chances of recognizing the signs of sexual violence, thus improving detection and prevention efforts. It is also important to acknowledge the low rates of disclosure by victims.

Additionally, this research seeks to provide recommendations for universities to implement preventive measures to protect students from falling victim to sexual violence. The involvement of professionals in the prevention of online sexual grooming, especially targeting children and adolescents, will further enhance efforts to address this issue [32].

METHOD

Research Procedure

In selecting participants, the researchers initially established both inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure the collection of relevant information aligned with the research objectives. The inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) participants were emerging adults, aged between 18 and 25 years; (2) participants had been victims of online sexual grooming; (3) the cases of online sexual grooming experienced by the participants had been resolved; and (4) participants were willing to voluntarily participate as informants in the study. The exclusion criteria included: (1) participants in a poor or compromised mental state; and (2) participants with limited cognitive abilities.

Prior to data collection, participants provided informed consent, and they were given detailed explanations regarding the objectives of the study and other relevant information. Data collection was carried out through interviews with participants between July and December 2023. Following this, the collected data was transcribed, coded, and analyzed for thematic patterns. The research procedure is illustrated in the flowchart below, as shown in Chart 1:

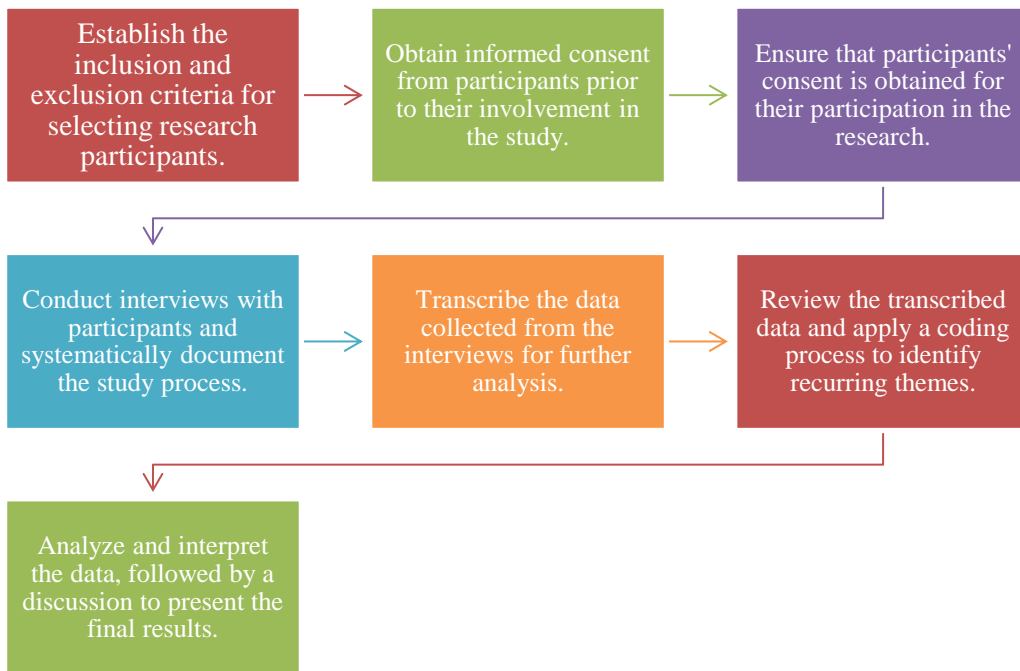


Chart 1 Research Procedure

As depicted in Chart 1, the diagram outlines the stages or procedures followed in this study. The first stage involves determining and establishing participant criteria, leading to the final phase, where the overall conclusions are drawn based on the victims' experiences.

Research Participants

In this research, data and information were gathered from two participants, both survivors of online sexual grooming. The researcher engaged with these participants, who had reported their cases to the PPKS Task Force at their respective university in 2023. The following table provides detailed information about the research participants. Please refer to Table 1 below:

Table 1. Participant Information

Aspect	Participant 1 (A)	Participant 2 (B)
Gender	Female	Female
Age	20 years old	20 years old
Onset of Grooming	Early 2021	Mid-year 2022
Duration of Grooming	2.5 years	1 year
Status	Student	Student
Type of Grooming	Online	Online

Based on Table 1 above, there are two victims were willing to become participants in this study. It appears that the initial introduction between the victim and the perpetrator occurred via Telegram, which was then continued through WhatsApp, showing an increasing level of attachment. The duration or length of time participants experienced online sexual grooming was 2.5 years for participant A and 1 year for participant B with the duration from the beginning of the relationship formation process to experiencing sexual violence. Both participants A and B explained that their relationship with the perpetrator was unclear or without status, but there seemed to be a bond with each other to provide commitment to exchanging news, stories, information, and having a favorite or special nickname. Two participants also explained that their relationship with the perpetrator was limited to online contact and never had a face-to-face meeting. Participants were incited to send the perpetrator photos or videos with sexual nuances, and the perpetrator sent the same thing to the victim, until they were forced by the perpetrator to help him masturbate online.

Research Instrument

In this study, data collection was conducted using semi-structured interviews, which included in-depth discussions with participants as well as evidence analysis. The interview protocol was developed beforehand to ensure that it could effectively extract information about the participants' initial introduction, the introduction process, relationship-building, the grooming process they experienced, and the impacts of online sexual grooming. Interviews were conducted over multiple sessions with each participant.

Data Analysis

The researcher employed qualitative methods, specifically a descriptive phenomenological approach. The aim of utilizing this phenomenological method was to delve into the personal experiences of the participants [33]. This approach was chosen to understand, describe, and interpret how each participant made sense of their experience, particularly their experience as victims of online sexual grooming [33]. The collected data was analyzed to identify common themes. Thematic analysis was applied to establish a framework for explaining the themes that were most relevant to the research objectives [34].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The initial analysis revealed three major themes: (1) pre-grooming, (2) during grooming, and (3) post-grooming. The pre-grooming phase refers to the process of initiation and the establishment of a close relationship with the perpetrator. The grooming phase involves the manipulative techniques used by the perpetrator to deceive and target the victim. Finally, the post-grooming phase relates to the impact experienced by the participants. The details are summarized in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Themes Before Grooming

Sub Themes	(A)	(B)
Introduction	From social media Telegram	From game booth on Telegram
Approach Process	Transition to WhatsApp with chat and calls	Transition to WhatsApp with chat, call, and video-call
Topic of Conversation	About daily life and activities	About daily activities and discussions regarding their relationship
Relationship Method	Chat, video call, call	Chat, video call, call, social media

As shown in Table 2, three sub-themes emerged in the pre-grooming phase. The first sub-theme, the introduction process, represents the initial stage of building a potential relationship [35]. Building rapport is a crucial step in establishing and maintaining a close relationship with the targeted victim [36]. Participant A became acquainted with the perpetrator during the pandemic when they spent significant time at home and engaged in social media. They initially met on the Telegram platform and then exchanged WhatsApp numbers. In contrast, Participant B first encountered the perpetrator as a new student and got to know them through a game booth on Telegram. After the conversation felt comfortable, they agreed to continue communicating via WhatsApp. Once the victim starts feeling comfortable and trusting the perpetrator, they enter the disclosure phase of grooming [35].

The initial interactions between the two participants appeared to be normal. They shared stories about their daily lives, gradually moving into more personal topics. Both participants felt at ease with the perpetrator, as they sensed care and continued to maintain frequent communication, including chatting, video calls, and exchanging photos. During the grooming process, the researcher identified several sub-themes associated with the manipulation techniques employed by the perpetrator. These findings align with similar

research by [25], though deception-based manipulation techniques were not observed in the cases of these two participants. Both perpetrators provided detailed information about their identities to the participants. Perpetrators of sexual violence via social media tend to avoid face-to-face interactions, instead opting to engage in more intense online communication [23], especially for the purpose of initiating sexual activities with their victims. This preference for virtual interaction was evident in both cases, as the perpetrators refrained from in-person meetings, maintaining their relationship exclusively through digital platforms. Successful grooming involves sophisticated manipulation skills, which facilitate the commission of sexual violence in a way that is less likely to be detected [37]. Below are some of the sub-themes related to the manipulation techniques employed by the perpetrator during the grooming process:

1. Conversation

Both participants shared that their interactions with the perpetrator began with ordinary, casual conversations. They communicated as friends, exchanging updates on their lives, including topics such as friendships, academics, and family matters. Occasionally, they also discussed personal issues, with the perpetrator offering responses that made the participants feel more at ease. These everyday conversations, which occurred almost daily, contributed to a deepening connection between the participants and the perpetrator, gradually building trust.

2. Regular or Intense Contact

The participants reported that the perpetrator maintained frequent and persistent communication with them. The perpetrator continuously engaged with them, providing regular updates and attention. Participant B, in particular, described the perpetrator's behavior as overly intense and sometimes excessively protective. On several occasions, the perpetrator insisted that Participant B send photos of herself while she engaged in various activities. Additionally, the perpetrator professed his love for her twice and asked her to be his girlfriend, though she rejected him. This continuous communication helped to foster trust and comfort, encouraging the participants to maintain their interactions with the perpetrator.

3. Secrecy

Secrecy, a common grooming manipulation technique, involves the perpetrator urging the victim to conceal their relationship. Participant A described how her communication with the perpetrator led her to gradually withdraw from her social circle. The perpetrator requested that she keep their relationship secret, especially from those close to her. This secrecy made Participant B feel as though she held a unique and special position in the perpetrator's life.

4. Sexualisation

The sub-theme of sexuality is a major and dominant component of grooming. Sexuality relates to a method by which victims of online sexuality violence are involved in the creation of vulgar content. Both Participants A and B experienced incidents where the perpetrator asked them to engage in sexualized conversations, create and receive sexual photos and videos, and masturbate online or video call sex. Participant A initially felt that there was a feeling of enthusiasm to send sexual photos or videos requested by the perpetrator, but slowly made him more depressed with the demands and threats made by the perpetrator so that Participant A would comply with his wishes. As for Participant B, from the beginning he had begun to feel depressed and anxious when the perpetrator started by provoking chats with sexual nuances and asking him to accompany him to masturbate via videocall.

5. Kindness and Flattery

Participant B reported that the perpetrator frequently showered her with compliments. Additionally, the perpetrator exhibited overprotective behavior, such as discouraging Participant B from wearing revealing clothing, forbidding her from getting too close to other men, and consistently praising her appearance whenever she sent photos of herself, often commenting that she looked beautiful.

6. Erratic Temperament and Hostility

Both participants reported receiving threats from the perpetrator, who threatened to distribute explicit photos or videos that had been sent by the participants. These threats typically emerged whenever the participants refused to comply with the perpetrator's demands, such as declining to send further explicit content. As a result of these threats, both participants experienced feelings of fear and anxiety, which led them to repeatedly

send the requested photos or videos. Additionally, Participant B described how the perpetrator's overprotective behavior contributed to feelings of significant distress.

This erratic behavior caused emotional instability in the perpetrator, exemplified by an incident where Participant B was instructed to return home and change clothes after a photo revealed that the clothing worn appeared too revealing. When Participant B failed to comply with the perpetrator's demands, the threats resurfaced. Both participants expressed a sense of fear and helplessness when confronted with these threats. Notably, Participant A, who had few close friends, did not disclose the situation to anyone in his inner circle. In contrast, Participant B confided in a close friend only when the pressure of the threats became unbearable.

7. Another Grooming Methode

Participant B reported that the perpetrator introduced him to his mother and also made a promise to meet him in person at a later time. These actions by the perpetrator led Participant B to believe that the perpetrator was demonstrating genuine intent regarding their relationship.

Following the occurrence of online sexual grooming, both participants experienced a mix of both positive and negative emotions. However, the predominant emotions felt by both participants were negative.

1. Positive Emotions

Generally, both participants expressed a sense of being noticed and cared for. The consistent, intense communication pattern they had with the perpetrator created a sense of loss when they were not in contact. The participants felt supported and valued, as though there was someone who paid attention to them. In particular, Participant B developed a belief that the perpetrator was serious about their relationship, especially after being introduced to the perpetrator's family, specifically his mother.

2. Negative Emotions

Despite the positive emotions, both participants predominantly experienced negative emotions, particularly when facing threats or the perpetrator's emotional instability. Participant A reported feeling fear and anxiety whenever the perpetrator threatened to

disseminate videos unless she complied with his demands. Additionally, Participant A felt increasingly isolated from her social circle, as the perpetrator insisted on keeping their relationship a secret from her closest contacts.

In contrast, Participant B began to feel discomfort when she was initially coerced into assisting the perpetrator's sexual activities via video call. Moreover, Participant B felt a deep sense of guilt when the perpetrator pressured her into engaging in sexual activities during the fasting month. She also experienced significant stress due to the perpetrator's overprotective behaviors. Both participants also experienced confusion, particularly regarding how to escape the psychological and emotional control exerted by the perpetrator. This confusion stemmed not only from the coercive tactics used by the perpetrator but also from the mixed feelings they had, as some of the perpetrator's actions also made them feel cared for.

This study examines the experiences of two women who fell victim to online sexual grooming by their perpetrators. The research underscores the rising prevalence of online sexual harassment, which affects not only adults but also individuals of all ages and genders. One literature review highlights three key stages in the grooming process: (1) self-grooming, (2) grooming the victim's environment and significant others, and (3) grooming the victim themselves. This study particularly focuses on the grooming process directed at the target victim, especially the strategies employed by perpetrators in online sexual grooming [24].

At the onset of grooming, perpetrators typically select targets and assess their vulnerabilities [16], [19], [38]. This preliminary phase involves building a rapport with the target, establishing a connection, and gaining insight into the victim's characteristics. The grooming process aims to foster trust, encouraging the victim to continue the interaction or communication [16], [20]. As part of the grooming process, perpetrators also engage in creating various social arrangements and gradually earning the victim's trust, beginning with identifying the target's weaknesses or vulnerabilities [20]. The grooming process generally unfolds in several stages [25], [39], [41], including:

- 1. Victim Selection:** In this stage, perpetrators identify vulnerable individuals who are easier to manipulate. Both participants were introduced via online platforms, where they were both relatively isolated, with few close friends, and characterized as introverted.

2. **Information Gathering:** The perpetrator begins to understand the needs and expectations of the target, subtly providing what the victim seems to desire, such as companionship or someone to confide in.
3. **Building Personal Connections:** In this phase, the perpetrator works on gaining the victim's trust. Both participants reported that the perpetrators continuously communicated with them and offered attention, aiming to establish a personal bond. Additionally, Participant A was particularly vulnerable, as she had limited supervision and was not closely connected with her parents [42]. This vulnerability made her more susceptible to the perpetrator's grooming tactics.
4. **Meeting the Needs and Establishing Credibility:** In this stage, the perpetrator seeks to secure their position in the victim's perception, aiming to create the image of a "real friend." In the case of Participant B, the perpetrator repeatedly expressed his love and desire for a romantic relationship, despite being continuously rejected. In contrast, the perpetrator in Participant A's case promised to always be there for her, further establishing his role as a supportive figure.
5. **Priming the Target:** At this point, the perpetrator begins to isolate the victim, gradually distancing her from her closest friends. This was particularly evident with Participant A, as the perpetrator convinced her that their relationship was special and should remain private, creating a sense of exclusivity. This manipulation led Participant A to withdraw from her social circle, particularly her friends, under the belief that her relationship with the perpetrator was unique.
6. **Instigating Sexual Contact:** At this stage, the perpetrator starts to introduce sexual activities, exploiting the victim's vulnerabilities to fulfill their desires. The perpetrator uses manipulative strategies to involve the victim in illicit actions, including those that are legally and morally wrong [43]. Both participants experienced requests to send sexually explicit photos or videos. In Participant B's case, the perpetrator subtly suggested that he had been seduced by a female friend and asked for Participant B's assistance in dealing with his unresolved lust. The perpetrator capitalized on Participant B's difficulty in refusing requests. In Participant A's case, the perpetrator exploited her

fear of losing contact, complimenting her excessively, which gradually led her to comply with his demands.

- 7. Controlling the Victim:** At this stage, the perpetrator seeks to establish control over the victim, ensuring ongoing compliance with their wishes. Both participants reported being threatened by the perpetrator [44], who threatened to share the explicit content the participants had sent him on social media platforms like Twitter or Instagram. These threats instilled fear in both participants, pushing them to comply with the perpetrator's demands under duress. In some instances, the perpetrator employed a strategy of sweet talk to manipulate the victims emotionally, trying to make them feel softened by his persuasion [44]. Alternatively, the perpetrator used a technique known as love-bombing, providing affection, respect, and sending sweet messages to the victim, further solidifying the emotional manipulation [45].

The grooming experienced by both participants was primarily psychological in nature. Psychological grooming involves manipulating the victim's mind to achieve the perpetrator's desired outcomes. The perpetrators employed several manipulation techniques, including conversation, regular/intense contact, secrecy, sexualization, kindness and flattery, erratic temperament and nastiness, and grooming others [25], [29]. Notably, no techniques involving deception or fraud were observed. Both perpetrators were transparent about their identities, with the perpetrator involved with Participant B even introducing his family. This indicates that it was the perpetrator's first experience engaging in online sexual grooming.

The findings also highlight that the impact of online sexual grooming on the two participants was predominantly negative. Online sexual grooming constitutes a severe form of sexual violence that significantly affects the victim's mental health [46], [47]. The participants experienced fear, anxiety, and confusion regarding their experiences [48], and they also faced self-blame [49], feeling guilty for engaging in sexual activities with the perpetrator [28]. These emotional responses impacted both their social interactions and their day-to-day functioning. Participant A became more withdrawn from her friends, while Participant B found it difficult to concentrate on her studies and felt limited in her freedom to engage in social activities. Both participants recognized the negative effects of their relationships with the perpetrators but continued to endure these relationships, especially Participant A, who often refocused on the positive aspects of her connection with the perpetrator.

The various experiences of victims subjected to online sexual grooming, along with the resulting impacts, underscore the critical role of various parties in supporting victims. Professionals such as counselors, teachers, and parents, who are knowledgeable about the grooming process, can help alleviate the victim's sense of self-blame regarding their experience of sexual violence [49]. Additionally, both external and internal factors play a significant role in the victim's recovery process. These factors include supportive environmental attitudes, self-awareness, internal motivation, and the ability to compare oneself with others in less distressing situations [50].

CONCLUSION

Based on the research conducted, it can be concluded that online sexual grooming follows a process, which may occur with or without premeditation by the perpetrator. In grooming the target victims specifically the two participants in this study the perpetrators utilized various manipulation techniques. These included intense communication, engaging in diverse conversations, offering attention, requesting the relationship be kept secret while presenting the victim as someone special, and introducing sexualized content, where the perpetrators began issuing threats to both participants. The effects of grooming experienced by the participants were predominantly negative, with both victims feeling depressed, anxious, fearful, and confused about how to escape from the perpetrators' manipulation. At times, they chose to remain in the relationship, particularly Participant A, who focused on the positive aspects she experienced while interacting with the perpetrator. This demonstrates that sexual crimes are no longer confined to offline spaces but can also be perpetrated online, given the advances in technology. Consequently, this research provides valuable insights for educational institutions, universities, agencies, and parents to develop preventive programs addressing online sexual grooming for children.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The researcher would like to express gratitude to the two participants who agreed to participate in this study and bravely shared their painful experiences. Additionally, we extend our thanks to our institution, Universitas Negeri Surabaya (UNESA), for their full

support in this research. We hope that this article contributes meaningfully to the fields of education, life, and serves as a valuable lesson for readers.

REFERENCES

- [1] KOMNAS Perempuan. (2022). *Bayang-Bayang Stagnansi: Daya Pencegahan dan Penanganan Berbanding Peningkatan Jumlah, Ragam dan Kompleksitas Kekerasan Berbasis Gender terhadap Perempuan*. CATAHU 2022: Catatan Tahunan Kekerasan terhadap Perempuan Tahun 2021.
- [2] Andaru, I. P. N. (2021). Cyber child grooming sebagai bentuk kekerasan berbasis gender online di era pandemi. *Jurnal Wanita dan Keluarga*, 2(1), 41–51. <https://doi.org/10.22146/jwk.2242>
- [3] Yuniartiningtiyas, I., & Widodo, S. (2022). Literature review: Analisis kasus grooming child pada penggunaan media sosial. *Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan*, 14(2), 119–127. <https://doi.org/10.21137/jpp.2022.14.2.3>
- [4] Salamor, A. M., Mahmud, A. N. F., Corputty, P., & Salamor, Y. B. (2020). Child grooming sebagai bentuk pelecehan seksual anak melalui aplikasi permainan daring. *SASI*, 26(4), 490. <https://doi.org/10.47268/sasi.v26i4.381>
- [5] KOMNAS Perempuan. (2023). *Kekerasan terhadap perempuan di ranah publik dan negara: Minimnya perlindungan dan pemulihan*. CATAHU 2023: Catatan Tahunan Kekerasan terhadap Perempuan Tahun 2022. Retrieved from <https://komnasperempuan.go.id/download-file/986>
- [6] Kusuma, E., & Veda, J. A. (2020). (Diancam) Konten intim diseber. Aku harus bagaimana? Panduan sigap hadapi penyebaran konten intim non konsensual. Retrieved from <https://awaskbgo.id/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Panduan-NCII-1-v3.pdf>
- [7] Afandi, A. (2019). Bentuk-bentuk perilaku bias gender. *LENTERA: Journal of Gender and Children Studies*, 1(1). <https://journal.unesa.ac.id/index.php/JOFC/article/view/6819>
- [8] Mulyono, B. (2023). Sexual violence in the discourse of digital citizens: Strengthening the concept of digital citizenship as online civic engagement. *Informasi*, 53(1), 139–150. <https://doi.org/10.21831/informasi.v53i1.61294>
- [9] Rochimah, T. H. N., & Rahmawati, W. (2021). Portrait of cyber sexual violence understanding on Indonesia millennials. *International Conference on Sustainable Innovation Track Humanities Education and Social Sciences (ICSIHES 2022)*. Retrieved from <https://www.atlantis-press.com/article/125967873>
- [10] Whittle, C. H., Hamilton-Giachritsis, E. C., & Beech, R. A. (2014). "Under his spell": Victims' perspectives of being groomed online. *Social Sciences*, 3(3), 404–426. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci3030404>

- [11] Whittle, H., Hamilton-Giachritsis, C., & Beech, A. (2013). Victims' voices: The impact of online grooming and sexual abuse. *Universal Journal of Psychology*, *1*(2), 59–71. <https://doi.org/10.13189/ujp.2013.010206>
- [12] Broome, L. J., Izura, C., & Lorenzo-Dus, N. (2018). A systematic review of fantasy-driven vs. contact-driven internet-initiated sexual offences: Discrete or overlapping typologies? *Child Abuse & Neglect*, *79*, 434–444. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2018.02.021>
- [13] Whittle, H. C., Hamilton-Giachritsis, C. E., & Beech, A. R. (2015). A comparison of victim and offender perspectives of grooming and sexual abuse. *Deviant Behavior*, *36*(7), 539–564. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2014.944074>
- [14] Whittle, H. C., Hamilton-Giachritsis, C., & Collings, B. (2013). A review of online grooming: Characteristics and concerns. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, *18*, 62–70. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2012.09.003>
- [15] Chiu, J., & Quayle, E. (2022). Understanding online grooming: An interpretative phenomenological analysis of adolescents' offline meetings with adult perpetrators. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, *128*, 105600. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2022.105600>
- [16] Winters, G. M., & Jeglic, E. L. (2022). *Sexual grooming: Integrating research, practice, prevention, and policy*. Springer.
- [17] Kloess, J. A., Hamilton-Giachritsis, C. E., & Beech, A. R. (2019). Offense processes of online sexual grooming and abuse of children via internet communication platforms. *Sexual Abuse*, *31*(1), 73–96. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1079063217720927>
- [18] Calvete, E., Orue, I., & Gámez-Guadi, M. (2022). A preventive intervention to reduce risk of online grooming among adolescents. *Psychosocial Intervention*, *31*(3), 177–184. <https://doi.org/10.5093/pi2022a14>
- [19] Winters, G. M., & Jeglic, E. L. (2022). The sexual grooming scale – Victim version: The development and pilot testing of a measure to assess the nature and extent of child sexual grooming. *Victims & Offenders*, *17*(6), 919–940. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15564886.2021.1974994>
- [20] Gill, A. K., & Harrison, K. (2015). Child grooming and sexual exploitation: Are South Asian men the UK media's new folk devils? *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy*, *4*(2), 34–49. <https://doi.org/10.5204/ijcjsd.v4i2.214>
- [21] Ringenberg, T. R., Seigfried-Spellar, K. C., Rayz, J. M., & Rogers, M. K. (2022). A scoping review of child grooming strategies: Pre- and post-internet. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, *123*, 105392. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2021.105392>

- [22] Pasca, P., Signore, F., Tralci, C., Gottardo, D. D., Longo, M., Preite, G., & Ciavolino, E. (2022). Detecting online grooming at its earliest stages: Development and validation of the Online Grooming Risk Scale. *Mediterranean Journal of Clinical Psychology, 10*(1). <https://doi.org/10.13129/2282-1619/mjcp-3248>
- [23] Briggs, P., Simon, W. T., & Simonsen, S. (2010). An exploratory study of internet-initiated sexual offenses and the chat room sex offender: Has the internet enabled a new typology of sex offender? *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment, 23*(1), 72–91. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1079063210384275>
- [24] Craven, S., Brown, S., & Gilchrist, E. (2006). Sexual grooming of children: Review of literature and theoretical considerations. *Journal of Sexual Aggression, 12*(3), 287–299. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552600601069414>
- [25] Whittle, H., Hamilton-Giachritsis, C., & Beech, A. (2014). "Under his spell": Victims' perspectives of being groomed online. *Social Sciences, 3*(3), 404–426.
- [26] O'Connell, R. (2000). *A typology of child cybersexexploitation and online grooming practices*. University of Central Lancashire.
- [27] Dönmez, Y. E., & Soylu, N. (2020). The relationship between online sexual solicitation and internet addiction in adolescents. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse, 29*(8), 911–923. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2020.1841355>
- [28] Hanson, E. (2017). The impact of online sexual abuse on children and young people. In J. Brown (Ed.), *Online risk to children* (1st ed., pp. 97–122). Wiley. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/9781118977545.ch6>
- [29] Hamilton-Giachritsis, C., Hanson, E., Whittle, H., Alves-Costa, F., & Beech, A. (2020). Technology assisted child sexual abuse in the UK: Young people's views on the impact of online sexual abuse. *Children and Youth Service Review, 119*, 105451. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105451>
- [30] Joleby, M., Lunde, C., Landström, S., & Jonsson, L. S. (2020). "All of me is completely different": Experiences and consequences among victims of technology-assisted child sexual abuse. *Frontiers in Psychology, 11*, 606218. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.606218>
- [31] Mitchell, K. J., Jones, L. M., Finkelhor, D., & Wolak, J. (2010). Internet-facilitated commercial sexual exploitation of children: Findings from a nationally representative sample of law enforcement agencies in the United States. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment, 23*(1), 43–71. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1079063210374347>
- [32] Carmo, E., & Manita, C. (2023). The knowledge, perceptions, and training needs about online sexual grooming of children and adolescents in a sample of professionals who work in Portugal. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse, 32*(6), 715–731. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2023.2234355>

- [33] Kahija, Y. F. L. (2017). *Penelitian fenomenologis jalan memahami pengalaman hidup*. Sleman: PT Kanisius (Anggota IKAPI).
- [34] Willig, C. (2008). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology: Adventures in theory and method* (2nd ed.). Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- [35] Elliott, I. A. (2017). A self-regulation model of sexual grooming. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 18*(1), 83–97. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838015591573>
- [36] Chiang, E., & Grant, T. (2017). Online grooming: Moves and strategies. *Language and Law, 4*(1), 103–141.
- [37] Winters, G., & Jeglic, E. (2016). Stages of sexual grooming: Recognizing potentially predatory behaviors of child molesters. *Deviant Behavior, 38*, 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2016.1197656>
- [38] Mohan, M., & Bakar, Y. A. (2016). A systematic literature review on the effects of bullying at school. *SCHOULID: Indonesian Journal of School Counseling, 6*(1), 35. <https://doi.org/10.23916/08747011>
- [39] Sinnamon, G. (2017). Chapter 16 - The psychology of adult sexual grooming: Sinnamon's seven-stage model of adult sexual grooming. In W. Petherick & G. Sinnamon (Eds.), *The psychology of criminal and antisocial behavior*. Academic Press. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/B978012809287300016X>
- [40] Winters, G. M., & Jeglic, E. L. (2016). I knew it all along: The sexual grooming behaviors of child molesters and the hindsight bias. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse, 25*, 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2015.1108945>
- [41] Winters, G. M., Jeglic, E. L., & Kaylor, L. E. (2020). Validation of the sexual grooming model of child sexual abusers. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse, 29*(7), 855–875. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2020.1801935>
- [42] Soldino, V., & Seigfried-Spellar, K. C. (2024). Criminological differences between contact-driven and online-focused suspects in online child sexual grooming police reports. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 149*, 106696. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2024.106696>
- [43] Lorenzo-Dus, N. (2023). *Digital grooming: Discourses of manipulation and cyber-crime* (1st ed.). USA: Oxford University Press.
- [44] Joleby, M., Lunde, C., Landström, S., & Jonsson, L. S. (2021). Offender strategies for engaging children in online sexual activity. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 120*, 105214. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2021.105214>
- [45] Lennings, C. J., Amon, K. L., Brummert, H., & Lennings, N. J. (2019). Grooming for terror: The internet and young people. *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law, 17*(3), 424–437. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13218710903566979>

- [46] Jonsson, L. S., Fredlund, C., Priebe, G., Wadsby, M., & Svedin, C. G. (2019). Online sexual abuse of adolescents by a perpetrator met online: A cross-sectional study. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health*, 13(1), 32. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13034-019-0292-1>
- [47] Dolev-Cohen, M., Yosef, T., & Meiselles, M. (2024). Parental responses to online sexual grooming events experienced by their teenage children. *European Journal of Investigation in Health, Psychology and Education*, 14(5), 1311–1324. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ejihpe14050086>
- [48] Schmidt, F., Varese, F., & Bucci, S. (2023). Understanding the prolonged impact of online sexual abuse occurring in childhood. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, 1281996. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1281996>
- [49] McElvaney, R. (2019). Grooming: A case study. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 28(5), 608–627. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2018.1554612>
- [50] Dumpratiwi, A. N., Karini, S. M., & Priyatama, A. N. (2020). Regaining a bright future: Psychological dynamics in female adolescent victims of sexual harassment. *Gadjah Mada Journal of Psychology*, 6(2), 120–131. <https://doi.org/10.22146/gamajop.55605>