

Child Grooming as Sexual Violence in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Child grooming is a manipulative process intended to sexually exploit victims, often conducted gradually and covertly. This phenomenon has gained global attention following alleged cases involving public figures, such as Kim Soo-hyun, which sparked discussions on legal protection for sexual violence victims. Although the term "child grooming" is not explicitly regulated in Indonesian law, such acts can be examined under Law No. 12 of 2022 on Sexual Violence Crimes (UU TPKS), which emphasizes victim protection, and, where relevant, the new Indonesian Penal Code (KUHP Baru) in the context of sexual offenses. This study employs a normative-juridical method with statutory and conceptual approaches to analyze legal regulation of child grooming. The findings indicate that while UU TPKS provides a legal framework for victim protection, the regulation of child grooming as a form of sexual violence remains implicit, highlighting the need for normative clarification. The study underscores the urgency of harmonizing legislation to ensure child grooming can be identified and addressed legally before resulting in sexual violence, thereby strengthening legal protection for victims. These findings are expected to contribute academically to the development of criminal law concerning children and sexual offenses in Indonesia.

Keywords: Child Grooming, Sexual Violence, UU TPKS.

ABSTRAK

Pelecehan anak adalah proses manipulatif yang bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi korban secara seksual, seringkali dilakukan secara bertahap dan terselubung. Fenomena ini telah menarik perhatian global menyusul dugaan kasus yang melibatkan tokoh publik, seperti Kim Soo-hyun, yang memicu diskusi tentang perlindungan hukum bagi korban kekerasan seksual. Meskipun istilah "pelecehan anak" tidak secara eksplisit diatur dalam hukum Indonesia, tindakan tersebut dapat diteliti di bawah UU No. 12 Tahun 2022 tentang Kejadian Kekerasan Seksual (UU TPKS), yang menekankan perlindungan korban, dan, jika relevan, KUHP Baru Indonesia dalam konteks tindak pidana seksual. Studi ini menggunakan metode normatif-yuridis dengan pendekatan hukum dan konseptual untuk menganalisis regulasi hukum pelecehan anak. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa meskipun UU TPKS menyediakan kerangka hukum untuk perlindungan korban, regulasi pelecehan anak sebagai bentuk kekerasan seksual tetap tersirat, menyoroti perlunya klarifikasi normatif. Studi ini menggarisbawahi urgensi harmonisasi legislasi untuk memastikan pelecehan anak dapat diidentifikasi dan ditangani secara hukum sebelum mengakibatkan kekerasan seksual, sehingga memperkuat perlindungan hukum bagi korban. Temuan ini diharapkan dapat memberikan kontribusi akademis terhadap pengembangan hukum pidana terkait anak dan tindak pidana seksual di Indonesia.

Kata Kunci : Pencabulan Anak, Kekerasan Seksual, UU TPKS.

INTRODUCTION

Child grooming constitutes a manipulative process carried out to gradually and covertly sexually exploit victims. This phenomenon has emerged as a global concern due to its far-reaching implications for child protection and the rights of victims of sexual violence. Allegations involving public figures, such as Kim Soo-hyun, have drawn international attention to the urgent need for adequate legal mechanisms to prevent and address such practices. Although the term "*child grooming*" is not explicitly recognized in Indonesian statutory law, the conduct in question conceptually falls within the scope of sexual violence as regulated under existing legislation.

Within the Indonesian legal framework, Law Number 12 of 2022 on Sexual Violence Crimes (Undang-Undang Tindak Pidana Kekerasan Seksual/UU TPKS) serves as the primary normative instrument governing the protection of victims of sexual violence. The UU TPKS emphasizes victim protection, crime prevention, and the prosecution of perpetrators. Several provisions of this law, while not expressly referring to child grooming, may nonetheless provide a legal basis for assessing manipulative behaviors that potentially lead to sexual violence. In addition, the newly enacted Criminal Code (KUHP), which came into force on 2 January 2026, is also relevant for examining sexual offences in a broader context and offers an additional legal framework for the criminal law enforcement of sexually exploitative conduct.

This study employs a normative juridical approach, utilizing statutory and conceptual analyses to examine the extent to which child grooming is regulated and may be subject to legal sanctions in Indonesia. The research focuses on assessing the normative framework of the UU TPKS and the new KUHP in addressing child grooming as a form of sexual violence, while also identifying potential legal gaps within the existing regulatory structure. The findings are expected to contribute academically to the development of criminal law concerning victim protection and sexual violence offences in Indonesia.

METHODS

This research applies a qualitative normative juridical method with a library-based legal research design. The study focuses on the analysis of statutory regulations and legal doctrines related to child grooming as a form of non-physical sexual violence, particularly within the framework of Law Number 12 of 2022 on Sexual Violence Crimes (UU TPKS). The research object consists of primary legal materials in the form of statutory provisions, especially UU TPKS, supported by secondary legal materials such as academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and scholarly commentaries discussing sexual violence, child protection, and criminal law policy. The literature was selected based on its relevance to the research topic, the credibility of the authors and publishers, and publication in reputable or accredited journals, with a preference for works published within the last ten to fifteen years. Data collection was conducted through documentary study by systematically reviewing and classifying relevant legal materials. The data analysis

employed qualitative normative analysis using statutory, conceptual, and systematic interpretation to examine the elements of child grooming and their correlation with the construction of non-physical sexual violence under UU TPKS. The findings are presented descriptively and analytically to demonstrate the normative accommodation of child grooming within Indonesian sexual violence law, despite the absence of an explicit statutory terminology.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Child grooming refers to a series of behaviors deliberately designed to build relationships, trust, and emotional closeness with children or adolescents for the purpose of manipulating victims into engaging in harmful conduct, including sexual violence, exploitation, and child trafficking (BCP Council, 2026). This practice may occur either offline or through online media, and perpetrators are not always strangers; they may also originate from the child's immediate social environment. In the grooming process, offenders often construct relationships that appear positive, such as acting as romantic partners, mentors, or authority figures, and may even establish communication with the victim's family or surrounding community to gain trust (BCP Council, 2026).

In the online context, child grooming exploits various communication technologies, including chat rooms, social media platforms, messaging applications, and online games to reach potential victims. Perpetrators may disguise their identities by pretending to be younger, offering excessive attention, gifts, or invitations to certain activities in order to strengthen emotional bonds and facilitate exploitation. The primary objectives of grooming include gaining access to the victim, obtaining child sexual material, fostering compliance and trust, maintaining secrecy, and avoiding detection of abusive conduct (National Office for Child Safety Australia). Importantly, grooming constitutes a manipulative process oriented toward sexual exploitation and may occur even when sexual violence has not yet materialized. Conversely, sexual violence may also occur without a prior grooming process, particularly in cases involving direct acts without relational development or gradual approaches. Therefore, grooming should not be understood merely as a consequence of sexual violence, but rather as a form of sexual violence itself, characterized by non-physical and progressive conduct.

In Indonesia, practices with similar characteristics are commonly referred to as *cyber grooming*, defined as the use of technology to target children who are considered vulnerable due to age, education, physical condition, or economic circumstances (Komnas Perempuan, 2019). This process involves efforts to lure, manipulate, or coerce children into sexual activities, whether through online interactions, webcam use, or the production of sexual material by the child (UNICEF, 2017; South Eastern CASA, 2017). Accordingly, child grooming can be categorized as a criminal activity that exploits social relationships and digital technology to facilitate children's involvement in sexual violence.

Child grooming is carried out through approaches and persuasion using various techniques that enable perpetrators to gain access to and control over victims

for sexual purposes. This process requires interpersonal skills, time management, and the ability to exploit situational opportunities, often resulting in children unconsciously “cooperating” with perpetrators (Salamor et al., 2020). Grooming typically begins with the selection of vulnerable victims, identification of their needs, persuasive engagement, relational control, and careful timing. In practice, offenders frequently utilize online gaming applications popular among children to facilitate this process.

In addition, perpetrators employ various online platforms, including social media, messaging applications, and online games, to maintain continuous communication with victims. By analyzing children's or adolescents' online profiles, offenders learn about their habits, interests, and personal circumstances to construct relationships that appear safe and trustworthy. This strategy allows perpetrators to conceal their true identities, for example by posing as other children or adolescents, thereby encouraging victims to feel comfortable and open (Solicitors, 2018). At later stages, perpetrators may request the exchange of phone numbers, initiate video calls, or instruct victims to perform pornographic acts that are recorded and subsequently used as tools of coercion to force repeated compliance (Salamor et al., 2020).

Generally, grooming cases involve efforts to build emotional relationships with children in order to gain their trust for purposes of sexual exploitation, sexual violence, or human trafficking. This process may occur online or face-to-face and may be perpetrated by strangers or individuals known to the child, including family members, friends, or professionals of various ages and genders. Many children and adolescents do not realize that they are victims of grooming until the resulting harm becomes more apparent (Solicitors, 2018).

The issue of child grooming is also reflected in a recent case that has attracted public and international media attention, namely allegations involving South Korean actor Kim Soo Hyun and Kim Sae Ron, an actress who passed away in February 2025. The controversy emerged after a digital media outlet released photographs and messages that some parties interpreted as indicating interactions when Kim Sae Ron was approximately 15 to 16 years old, while Kim Soo Hyun was already an adult. The late actress's family subsequently demanded public clarification and an apology, questioning whether the relationship began while Kim Sae Ron was still a minor. Kim Soo Hyun and his agency firmly denied the allegations, asserting that any relationship occurred only after Kim Sae Ron reached adulthood and pursuing legal action against those disseminating the accusations. To date, allegations of child grooming in this case remain within the realm of public controversy and have not been adjudicated through formal legal proceedings; therefore, all interpretations must be understood as unproven claims (BBC News, 2025).

This case illustrates that the advancement of internet technology and ease of online access have created opportunities for perpetrators to reach victims and engage in sexual activities, contributing to the increasing prevalence of online child grooming. Online child grooming can be understood as the use of internet technology by perpetrators to approach children for purposes of sexual exploitation,

whether conducted entirely online or followed by offline encounters (Salamor et al., 2020).

The impacts of sexual violence on children encompass both physical and psychological dimensions. Physical impacts include the risk of unwanted pregnancy, abortion, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and HIV infection (Winarni, 2018). Psychologically, child victims frequently experience behavioral changes such as nightmares, sleep disturbances, unexplained fear, anxiety, irritability, social withdrawal, sadness, and altered eating patterns. In some cases, victims suffer from depression, resentment, guilt, stress, and even STIs (NCTSN, 2013; Salamor et al., 2020). These psychological effects also impair concentration and academic performance, which often decline (Wahyu Agustina & Kusumaning Ratri, 2018). Moreover, the psychological consequences of sexual violence are generally long-term and may persist for years after the incident, significantly affecting victims' emotional and social development (Winarni, 2018). Accordingly, the use of technology in online child grooming practices poses serious consequences for children's well-being and underscores the urgency of effective legal frameworks for prevention and protection.

Based on the 2024 Annual Report on Violence Against Women (CATAHU 2024) released by the National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan), although overall reports of violence against women reached hundreds of thousands of cases throughout 2024, specific data on sexual violence against children were also recorded. Within the table of forms of sexual violence, the category of sexual intercourse, acts, or sexual exploitation of children referring to victims under 18 years of age—as defined by national law—recorded 103 cases. This figure constitutes part of the total 20,958 reports of sexual violence mapped in CATAHU 2024. These data demonstrate that children remain a vulnerable group within national sexual violence statistics and reaffirm that sexual violence against children is a critical issue requiring legal attention and state protection. Furthermore, the data indicate the potential presence of practices consistent with child grooming characteristics that are not yet explicitly identified within formal data collection systems (Komnas Perempuan Annual Report, 2025).

Law Number 12 of 2022 on Sexual Violence Crimes (*UU TPKS*) does not explicitly employ the term *child grooming*. Nevertheless, the law adopts a substantive, act-based approach that allows child grooming practices to be qualified as sexual violence crimes, particularly non-physical sexual harassment. This approach aligns with the nature of child grooming, which at its initial stages typically involves psychological manipulation and sexually charged communication without direct physical contact.

Article 4 letter (d) of the *UU TPKS* stipulates that one form of sexual violence crime is non-physical sexual harassment. This provision constitutes the primary normative basis for construing child grooming as a punishable offense, as grooming frequently involves text messages, online conversations, requests for photos or videos, and other forms of sexually explicit communication. Accordingly, the *UU TPKS* explicitly recognizes that sexual violence does not require physical contact but may occur through non-physical acts that violate a victim's sexual integrity.

Furthermore, Article 5 of the *UU TPKS* formulates the elements of non-physical sexual harassment as follows: (1) the existence of non-physical sexual conduct; (2) conduct directed at a person's body, sexual desire, or reproductive function; and (3) conduct that causes discomfort, offense, humiliation, degradation, or intimidation. In the context of child grooming, these elements are fulfilled when perpetrators deliberately engage in sexually nuanced communication with children, manipulate victims' emotions and trust, and place them in psychologically vulnerable positions. Even in the absence of physical sexual violence, such actions violate children's sexual integrity and cause significant psychological harm.

The correlation between Article 5 of the *UU TPKS* and child grooming is further strengthened when considering the child as a victim. Children are psychologically immature and lack the capacity to fully comprehend the sexual intentions of perpetrators; therefore, any apparent consent given by a child cannot be regarded as legally valid. Consequently, grooming practices involving manipulation, persuasion, or emotional approaches toward children satisfy the element of abuse of power, even where no formal authority relationship exists.

Additionally, Article 15 of the *UU TPKS* provides for sentence enhancement when sexual violence crimes are committed against children. This provision affirms that the *UU TPKS* offers special protection to children as a vulnerable group, including in cases of non-physical sexual harassment. Thus, when child grooming is perpetrated against individuals under 18 years of age, the conduct not only fulfills the elements of Article 5 but is also subject to aggravated penalties under Article 15 of the *UU TPKS*. This demonstrates that the law provides an adequate normative basis to address child grooming, despite the absence of an explicit standalone provision. Such an approach positions child grooming within a continuum of sexual violence, where abuse may originate from non-physical acts and escalate into physical violence or sexual exploitation. Accordingly, the *UU TPKS* enables early legal intervention at the initial stages of sexual violence, prior to the occurrence of more severe harm to children.

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, it can be inferred that the practice of child grooming constitutes a form of sexual violence that is non-physical, gradual, and manipulative in nature, which has been substantively accommodated within the framework of Law Number 12 of 2022 on Sexual Violence Crimes. Although the term child grooming is not explicitly mentioned, the normative construction of Article 4 letter (d) and Article 5 of the *UU TPKS* allows such practices to be legally qualified as non-physical sexual harassment, particularly when the victim is a child under the age of 18 who is legally and psychologically positioned in a vulnerable state. The aggravation of penalties for offences committed against child victims, as stipulated in Article 15 of the *UU TPKS*, further underscores the State's commitment to providing special protection for children against sexual violence rooted in power imbalances and psychological manipulation. Accordingly, the *UU TPKS* functions not only as a repressive legal instrument applied after the occurrence of physical

sexual violence, but also as a preventive legal framework that enables law enforcement intervention at the early stages of sexual violence, including during the grooming phase, in order to prevent more severe harm to the integrity and development of children.

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