

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR CHILD PROTECTION IN ADDRESSING ONLINE GROOMING IN INDONESIA

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Abstract:

Online grooming has emerged as a critical threat to child safety in Indonesia's rapidly digitalizing society. This study examines communication strategies for child protection against online grooming through a comprehensive library research methodology, analyzing statistical data, legal frameworks, and existing literature. The research reveals that despite legal protections under Law No. 1 of 2023 on the Criminal Code, Law No. 19 of 2016 on Electronic Information and Transactions, and Law No. 35 of 2014 on Child Protection, implementation gaps persist. Key findings indicate that effective protection requires multi-stakeholder collaboration involving families, educational institutions, government agencies, and civil society organizations. The study identifies six critical dimensions: understanding online grooming patterns, digital literacy enhancement, family communication strengthening, educational institution roles, legal framework effectiveness, and integrated protection strategies. Recommendations emphasize the need for comprehensive digital safety education, strengthened reporting mechanisms, and culturally-sensitive prevention programs that align with Indonesian Islamic values and local wisdom.

Keywords: *online grooming, child protection, communication strategies*

Abstrak:

Online grooming telah muncul sebagai ancaman kritis terhadap keamanan anak dalam masyarakat Indonesia yang berkembang pesat secara digital. Penelitian ini mengkaji strategi komunikasi perlindungan anak terhadap online grooming melalui metodologi penelitian kepustakaan yang komprehensif, menganalisis data statistik, kerangka hukum, dan literatur yang ada. Penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa meskipun terdapat perlindungan hukum di bawah UU No. 1 Tahun 2023 tentang KUHP, UU No. 19 Tahun 2016 tentang ITE, dan UU No. 35 Tahun 2014 tentang Perlindungan Anak, kesenjangan implementasi masih terjadi. Temuan utama menunjukkan bahwa perlindungan efektif memerlukan kolaborasi multi-pemangku kepentingan yang melibatkan keluarga, institusi pendidikan, lembaga pemerintah, dan organisasi masyarakat sipil. Studi ini mengidentifikasi enam dimensi kritis: memahami pola online grooming, peningkatan literasi digital, penguatan komunikasi keluarga, peran institusi pendidikan, efektivitas kerangka hukum, dan strategi perlindungan terintegrasi. Rekomendasi menekankan perlunya pendidikan keamanan digital yang komprehensif, penguatan mekanisme pelaporan, dan program pencegahan yang sensitif budaya yang sejalan dengan nilai-nilai Islam Indonesia dan kearifan lokal.

Kata Kunci: *online grooming, perlindungan anak, strategi komunikasi*

A. INTRODUCTION

The massive digital transformation in Indonesia has introduced unprecedented challenges in child protection, particularly concerning the phenomenon of online grooming. Data from the Ministry of Communication and Informatics shows that 79.5% of Indonesian children and adolescents are active internet users, with average usage reaching 8-9 hours per day (Kominfo, 2023). This increased digital accessibility correlates directly with rising cases of online child sexual exploitation, where online grooming has become the most common modus operandi used by predators to manipulate and exploit children.

Online grooming refers to a series of manipulative actions conducted by adult perpetrators to build emotional relationships with children through digital platforms, with the ultimate goal of sexual exploitation. Reports from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) documented a significant increase in online sexual violence cases against children, from 679 cases in 2020 to 1,281 cases in 2023, with the majority of cases initiated through grooming processes on social media and messaging applications (KPAI, 2024). This data indicates the urgency of developing comprehensive and contextual child protection communication strategies that reflect Indonesia's digital reality.

This research offers novelty by integrating a multidisciplinary perspective encompassing communication, law, child developmental psychology, and Islamic values that form the foundation of Indonesian society. Unlike previous studies that tend to focus on single aspects, this research critically analyzes the interconnection between family communication strategies, educational institution roles, legal framework effectiveness, and civil society participation in creating a protective ecosystem for children in the digital space. From an Islamic perspective, as discussed by Putri (2024) in the context of child protection affected by Covid-19, the concept of hifdz al-nasl (protection of lineage and progeny) provides a strong theological foundation for comprehensive child protection efforts.

The urgency of this research is further reinforced by the unique characteristics of online grooming in the Indonesian context, where perpetrators often exploit cultural values of politeness and respect for elders, as well as children's limited understanding of digital boundaries. Putri, Mahfuz, and Nizamudin (2024) in their study on inclusive village strategies emphasize that child welfare requires not only legal protection but also active community involvement and open communication. Furthermore, the research by Putri, Arfan, and Nizamudin (2024) on family resilience during the 2024 General Election demonstrates how family crises can affect children's vulnerability to external threats, including online grooming.

This study aims to: (1) map online grooming patterns in Indonesia and their impact on child safety; (2) analyze the effectiveness of existing legal frameworks in addressing online grooming; (3) identify critical communication strategies for child protection at family, educational, and community levels; (4) formulate integrated recommendations based on empirical findings and Islamic principles that are relevant to the Indonesian context. Through this comprehensive approach, this research is expected to contribute to the development of more effective and culturally-responsive child protection policies in the digital era.

B. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative approach through library research methodology, systematically collecting and analyzing secondary data from various sources including academic journals, government reports, statistical data from relevant institutions such as KPAI, Kominfo, and the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, as well as legal documents including Law No. 1 of 2023 on the Criminal Code, Law No. 19 of 2016 on ITE, and Law No. 35 of 2014 on Child Protection. Data collection was conducted through documentation studies of publications from the last five years (2019-2024) to ensure relevance and currency of information. Data analysis employed content analysis and critical discourse analysis techniques to identify patterns, themes, and relationships between various dimensions of child protection communication strategies. The analytical framework integrates socio-legal approaches with communication theory and Islamic perspectives on child protection to produce comprehensive and contextual findings for Indonesian society.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Understanding Online Grooming: Patterns, Stages, and Characteristics in the Indonesian Context

Online grooming represents a systematic and calculated process through which perpetrators establish trust and emotional connections with children for exploitation purposes. Research indicates that grooming typically occurs in five progressive stages: target selection, gaining access, trust development, desensitization, and exploitation (Whittle et al., 2021). In the Indonesian context, these patterns manifest through specific cultural and technological characteristics that make children particularly vulnerable.

Data from the National Commission for Child Protection shows that 67% of online grooming cases in Indonesia occur through popular social media platforms including Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp, with perpetrators often posing as peers or offering opportunities such as modeling contracts, scholarships, or gaming partnerships (KPAI, 2024). The average grooming process lasts between 2-6 weeks, during which perpetrators gradually escalate communication from general conversations to increasingly personal and sexual content. This pattern aligns with international research but is characterized by specifically Indonesian elements, including exploitation of cultural norms around respect for authority figures and the taboo nature of discussing sexual topics within families.

A critical analysis reveals that perpetrators frequently exploit the digital divide between generations, where children possess greater technical proficiency than their parents but lack the critical thinking skills to identify manipulation tactics. The research by Sumardi, Ahmad, Pranata, Yasa, and Rosdiyanti (2024) on strengthening anti-sexual violence awareness through public dialogue emphasizes the importance of community education in recognizing grooming patterns. Perpetrators also capitalize on children's psychological developmental needs for validation, belonging, and independence, offering attention and understanding that may be perceived as lacking in their offline relationships.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly altered grooming dynamics in Indonesia. With increased online learning and reduced face-to-face supervision, children's

screen time has dramatically increased, creating expanded opportunities for predators. Studies indicate a 40% increase in child exploitation material reports during 2020-2021, suggesting that pandemic-related isolation has intensified both victimization risks and reporting mechanisms (Internet Watch Foundation, 2021). This situational vulnerability underscores the urgent need for adaptive communication strategies that respond to evolving digital landscapes.

2. Digital Literacy as a Cornerstone of Child Protection

Digital literacy emerges as a fundamental protective factor against online grooming, yet significant gaps exist in Indonesian children's understanding of digital safety. A comprehensive digital literacy framework must encompass not only technical skills but also critical thinking, ethical awareness, and risk management capabilities. Current data suggests that while 79.5% of Indonesian children are active internet users, only 23% have received formal digital safety education, creating a dangerous knowledge vacuum that predators exploit (Kominfo, 2023).

Effective digital literacy programs must address multiple competency domains. First, technical literacy involves understanding privacy settings, recognizing secure websites, and managing digital footprints. Second, information literacy encompasses evaluating online content credibility, identifying manipulated information, and understanding algorithmic influence. Third, communication literacy includes recognizing inappropriate contact, understanding consent in digital contexts, and developing assertiveness in refusing unwanted interactions. Fourth, critical literacy involves analyzing power dynamics in online relationships, identifying grooming tactics, and understanding the permanence of digital content (Livingstone et al., 2021).

The integration of Islamic values into digital literacy education provides culturally-resonant frameworks for Indonesian children. Concepts such as hifz al-'ird (protection of honor), maintaining appropriate boundaries in interactions, and the principle of maslahah (public interest) in sharing information can be effectively incorporated into digital safety curricula. Putri (2024) argues that Islamic jurisprudence provides robust frameworks for child protection that can be adapted to contemporary digital challenges, emphasizing both individual responsibility and collective obligation in safeguarding children.

However, digital literacy education faces significant implementation challenges in Indonesia. Resource disparities between urban and rural areas create unequal access to quality digital safety education. Many educators lack training in digital pedagogy and are themselves insufficiently literate in emerging technologies. Additionally, the rapid evolution of digital platforms means that curricula quickly become outdated. Addressing these challenges requires systemic investment in teacher training, curriculum development, and ongoing program evaluation to ensure effectiveness across diverse Indonesian contexts.

3. Strengthening Family Communication: The First Line of Defense

Family communication represents the primary protective mechanism against online grooming, yet many Indonesian families struggle with discussing digital safety due to cultural taboos, generational digital divides, and limited awareness of online risks.

Research consistently demonstrates that children who maintain open communication with parents about their online activities are significantly less likely to experience online victimization (Jones et al., 2020). However, effective family communication requires intentional strategies that overcome existing barriers.

The concept of "digital parenting" has emerged as a framework for active parental engagement with children's digital lives. This approach encompasses four key dimensions: active mediation (discussing online experiences), restrictive mediation (setting rules and limits), co-using (shared digital activities), and monitoring (awareness of children's online activities). Research by Putri, Arfan, and Nizamudin (2024) on family resilience emphasizes that strong family communication serves as a protective factor during crises, including threats from online predators. Families that establish clear expectations, maintain regular conversations about digital experiences, and create non-judgmental environments for disclosure demonstrate significantly lower victimization rates.

In the Indonesian context, family communication strategies must navigate cultural complexities. Traditional hierarchical family structures may inhibit open dialogue about sensitive topics, with children reluctant to share concerns for fear of punishment or device confiscation. The research by Putri, Hadi, and Amifah (2024) on village councils in preventing child marriage demonstrates how community engagement and education can support family decision-making, a principle equally applicable to digital safety. Parents must be equipped to discuss topics including online relationships, digital privacy, sexual content, and exploitation risks in age-appropriate and culturally-sensitive ways.

Furthermore, Islamic principles provide valuable frameworks for family communication about digital safety. The concept of tarbiyah (education and nurturing) emphasizes parents' responsibility to guide children's moral and behavioral development. The prophetic model of compassionate communication, patience, and creating safe spaces for dialogue offers culturally-resonant approaches to discussing difficult topics. Religious teachings about modesty, appropriate relationships, and protection from harm can be effectively integrated into conversations about online safety, providing familiar reference points for both parents and children.

Practical implementation of strengthened family communication requires accessible resources and community support. Parent education programs must address both technical aspects of digital platforms and communication skills for sensitive conversations. Community-based support groups can reduce isolation and share effective strategies. Government and civil society organizations should develop culturally-appropriate educational materials that reflect Indonesian family structures and values. As highlighted by Putri, Muninmmah, and Yulinarti (2024) in their research on long-distance marriage perspectives, family cohesion and communication remain protective factors even in challenging circumstances.

4. The Role of Educational Institutions in Creating Safe Digital Environments

Educational institutions serve as critical sites for child protection education, providing structured opportunities to build digital literacy, recognize grooming tactics, and access support services. However, Indonesian schools face significant challenges in

implementing comprehensive digital safety programs, including limited resources, insufficient teacher training, and competing curriculum demands. Despite these obstacles, schools remain uniquely positioned to reach children with consistent, age-appropriate prevention education.

Effective school-based prevention programs incorporate multiple elements. First, curriculum integration embeds digital safety across subject areas rather than treating it as a standalone topic, reinforcing concepts through repeated exposure. Second, age-appropriate content ensures that information matches children's developmental capabilities and risk exposures. Third, interactive pedagogy employs role-playing, case studies, and discussion rather than passive lectures, enhancing engagement and retention. Fourth, school climate initiatives create cultures of safety where children feel comfortable reporting concerns without fear of blame or consequences (Wurtele, 2020).

The research by Putri, Mahfuz, and Nizamudin (2024) on inclusive village strategies for child welfare emphasizes the importance of holistic approaches that integrate multiple community actors, including schools. Educational institutions must develop clear reporting protocols, train staff to recognize signs of victimization, and establish referral pathways to mental health and legal services. School counselors and teachers require specialized training to respond appropriately to disclosures, provide immediate support, and coordinate with child protection agencies and law enforcement.

Indonesian schools can leverage existing character education frameworks to integrate digital safety. The national curriculum's emphasis on Pancasila values including respect, responsibility, and social justice provides natural connection points for discussions about ethical online behavior and protecting vulnerable peers. Islamic schools (madrasah) can similarly incorporate digital safety into akhlaq (character) education, emphasizing Islamic ethics in digital spaces. However, implementation requires addressing teacher confidence and competence through professional development that builds both technical knowledge and pedagogical skills for addressing sensitive topics.

Furthermore, peer education represents an underutilized strategy in Indonesian schools. Adolescents often learn about digital platforms and trends from peers rather than adults, making peer educators credible sources of information. Trained student ambassadors can facilitate workshops, create awareness campaigns, and serve as accessible points of contact for classmates experiencing online concerns. This approach aligns with research on youth participation in social change and recognizes adolescents as active agents in their own protection rather than passive recipients of adult interventions.

5. Legal Framework Analysis: Gaps and Opportunities in Indonesian Child Protection Law

Indonesia's legal framework for child protection has evolved significantly in recent years, yet critical gaps remain in addressing online grooming effectively. The primary legislation includes Law No. 35 of 2014 on Child Protection, Law No. 19 of 2016 on Electronic Information and Transactions (ITE Law), and most recently, Law No. 1 of 2023 on the Criminal Code. These laws establish important protections but face implementation challenges and conceptual limitations in addressing the specific dynamics of online grooming.

Law No. 1 of 2023 on the Criminal Code represents significant progress in criminalizing child exploitation. Article 419 specifically addresses child grooming, defining it as actions taken to approach, invite, or communicate with children with the intention of committing sexual violence. Penalties include imprisonment of up to 12 years and fines up to IDR 600 million. This explicit recognition of grooming as a distinct criminal offense represents a crucial shift from previous legislation that only criminalized completed sexual acts, acknowledging that the preparatory manipulation itself causes harm and requires intervention (Law No. 1, 2023).

The ITE Law provides additional protections against digital exploitation. Article 27(1) prohibits distributing content that violates decency, while Article 45(1) establishes penalties for violations. However, the law's broad language has generated criticism for potential overreach and ambiguity in application. More specifically relevant to grooming, Article 29 prohibits threatening or frightening individuals through electronic means, though this provision does not explicitly address the manipulative trust-building characteristic of grooming processes. The 2024 amendments to the ITE Law have attempted to address some concerns, but gaps remain in specifically addressing the full continuum of grooming behaviors (Law No. 19, 2016).

Critical legal gaps exist in several areas. First, insufficient procedural provisions for child-friendly investigation and prosecution processes may re-traumatize victims and deter reporting. Second, limited provisions for platform accountability fail to obligate social media companies to implement robust safety features or report suspected grooming. Third, inadequate resources for law enforcement training and specialized units result in inconsistent application of existing laws. Fourth, minimal integration between criminal justice and child welfare systems limits holistic support for victims. As noted by Putri (2024) in research on parental criminal liability in the juvenile justice system, effective child protection requires coordinated action across legal, social welfare, and community systems.

From an Islamic legal perspective, online grooming violates multiple principles of *maqasid al-shariah* (objectives of Islamic law), particularly *hifz al-nasl* (protection of lineage and progeny) and *hifz al-'ird* (protection of honor). Islamic jurisprudence's emphasis on preventing harm (*dar' al-mafasid*) and protecting the vulnerable provides strong theological foundations for robust legal interventions. The research by Kariani, Hadi, and Amifah (2024) on village councils preventing child marriage demonstrates how Islamic values can be mobilized in community-level protection efforts, offering models for similarly value-based approaches to digital safety.

International comparative analysis reveals that Indonesia's legal framework could benefit from several enhancements observed in other jurisdictions. These include mandatory reporting obligations for platform providers, statutory duties of care requiring companies to implement proactive safety measures, specialized online child protection units within law enforcement, and dedicated child advocacy centers providing coordinated multi-disciplinary responses. While direct transplantation of foreign legal models must account for Indonesian legal traditions and cultural contexts, these international practices offer valuable insights for strengthening domestic protections.

6. Integrated Protection Strategies: Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration and Community-Based Approaches

Effective child protection against online grooming requires coordinated action across multiple stakeholders, transcending any single institution or intervention. An integrated protection model recognizes that families, schools, government agencies, technology companies, civil society organizations, and religious institutions each possess unique capabilities and responsibilities in creating safe digital environments for children. However, Indonesia currently lacks robust coordination mechanisms, resulting in fragmented and inefficient responses.

A comprehensive protection ecosystem must establish clear roles and accountability for each stakeholder. Government agencies, including the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, Ministry of Communication and Informatics, and Ministry of Education, must coordinate policy development, resource allocation, and monitoring mechanisms. Law enforcement requires specialized training, adequate resources, and inter-agency cooperation protocols for investigating and prosecuting online grooming cases. Technology companies must implement proactive safety features, transparent reporting mechanisms, and cooperation with law enforcement investigations. Schools need resources, training, and clear guidelines for prevention education and response protocols. Civil society organizations contribute expertise, advocacy, and direct services including helplines, counseling, and victim support (Gewirtz-Meydan et al., 2022).

The research by Putri, Mahfuz, and Nizamudin (2024) on inclusive village strategies demonstrates the potential of community-based approaches for child welfare. Traditional Indonesian social structures, including RT/RW (neighborhood) organizations, PKK (Family Welfare Movement), and religious communities, offer existing networks for disseminating information, identifying at-risk children, and providing informal support. These community structures can be mobilized as protective assets, creating layered defenses that complement formal institutions. However, this requires capacity building to ensure community members understand digital threats and can respond appropriately without stigmatizing victims.

Faith-based organizations, particularly Islamic institutions given Indonesia's Muslim-majority population, represent underutilized resources in child protection efforts. Mosques, pesantren (Islamic boarding schools), and Islamic educational institutions reach millions of families and youth. Integrating digital safety education into Friday sermons, religious classes, and community programs can leverage trusted religious authorities to deliver prevention messages in culturally-resonant frameworks. The research by Yulinarti and Sontani (2024) on polygamy and Islamic family law demonstrates how Islamic jurisprudence can address contemporary family challenges, offering models for similarly applying Islamic principles to digital safety concerns.

Technology-facilitated solutions offer additional protective mechanisms. Age verification systems, AI-powered content moderation, and automatic detection of grooming language can identify risks before exploitation occurs. However, these technological interventions raise important concerns about privacy, surveillance, and potential errors. Balancing child safety with rights to privacy and freedom of expression requires careful policy

development with input from multiple stakeholders, including children themselves as rights-holders with valuable perspectives on their own protection needs.

Critical to integrated protection is establishing accessible reporting and support mechanisms. Many children experience exploitation but never report due to shame, fear of consequences, or lack of awareness about available services. Multi-channel reporting systems including hotlines, online portals, school-based contacts, and community figures can reduce barriers to disclosure. Trained responders must provide trauma-informed, non-judgmental support that prioritizes children's safety and wellbeing. Referral pathways connecting initial disclosure to comprehensive services including legal advocacy, mental health support, and social services require clear protocols and adequate resources.

Finally, integrated protection strategies must incorporate ongoing monitoring, evaluation, and adaptation. The digital landscape evolves rapidly, with new platforms, technologies, and exploitation tactics emerging constantly. Protection systems require built-in mechanisms for tracking trends, evaluating intervention effectiveness, and updating approaches based on evidence and emerging threats. This adaptive capacity ensures that protection efforts remain relevant and effective despite technological and social changes.

D. CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that addressing online grooming in Indonesia requires comprehensive, multi-dimensional communication strategies that integrate legal frameworks, family engagement, educational interventions, digital literacy development, and community mobilization. Despite progress in legal protections through Law No. 1 of 2023 on the Criminal Code and amendments to the ITE Law, significant implementation gaps persist, including limited awareness, inadequate resources for enforcement, and insufficient coordination among stakeholders. Key findings indicate that effective protection depends on strengthening family communication through culturally-sensitive approaches that navigate generational digital divides and traditional hierarchies; enhancing digital literacy education that builds critical thinking alongside technical skills; empowering educational institutions with resources, training, and clear protocols; mobilizing community-based networks including religious institutions as protective assets; and establishing integrated, multi-stakeholder coordination mechanisms. Recommendations emphasize developing comprehensive national action plans with clear roles and accountability; investing in educator and parent training programs; mandating platform provider responsibilities for child safety; establishing accessible, trauma-informed reporting and support systems; and integrating Islamic values and local wisdom into prevention efforts to ensure cultural resonance. Future research should examine intervention effectiveness through longitudinal studies, explore children's perspectives as active participants in their own protection, and investigate the specific vulnerabilities of marginalized populations including rural children, children with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ youth. Only through sustained, coordinated efforts across all sectors of society can Indonesia create a digital environment where children can safely explore, learn, and connect while protected from exploitation.

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