Social Media and the Risk of Sexual Abuse Against Teens

*Adhalia Zatalini*

1Universitas Tanjungpura, Indonesia

*Corresponding Email Author: adhalia.zatalini@fkip.untan.ac.id

**Keywords**

Social Media, Sexual Harassment, Teenagers

**Abstract**

This study examines how social media risks such as anonymity and wide accessibility contribute to the vulnerability of teenagers to sexual harassment. The increasing use of social media among teenagers brings both positive and negative impacts. One of the serious risks that has emerged is sexual harassment, which can occur in various forms such as grooming, non-consensual sexting, cyberstalking, and revenge porn. Statistical data and case studies show a significant increase in incidents of sexual harassment on digital platforms. The psychological and social impacts of this harassment are highly detrimental, including depression, anxiety, trauma, social isolation, and a decline in academic performance. To address this issue, collaborative efforts are needed from parents, schools, and social media platforms in the form of education, supervision, and strict security policies. By increasing awareness and preventive actions, we can protect teenagers from the threat of sexual harassment on social media, making it a safer and more positive environment for their development.

**How to cite this article:**


Submit date: February 1, 2024
Review date: February 20, 2024
Accepted: March 15, 2024
Published: March 28, 2024
INTRODUCTION

Social media has become an inseparable part of daily life, especially for teenagers. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and Snapchat offer means for communication, sharing experiences, and building self-identity. According to the 2024 survey by the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII), the internet penetration rate in Indonesia has increased to 79.5%. This means that 221,563,479 people are connected out of a total population of 278.6 million. Aprilia et al. (2018) state that the use of the internet to access social media continues to increase year by year, marked by the growing duration of daily social media use: 1-3 hours (43.89%), 4-7 hours (29.63%), and more than 7 hours (26.48%). This widespread use of social media has led to the formation of a new social interaction called Social Networking, a social structure formed by individuals or groups connected by one or more interdependent factors, such as friendship, kinship, common interests, trade, dislikes, dating, shared beliefs, knowledge, and prestige.

The presence of social media has a significant impact on human life, including among teenagers. The development of information technology has led to the emergence of social media, which provides many conveniences for teenagers to spend a considerable amount of time in the virtual world. With the various platforms available on social media, a large number of teenagers use it as a tool to communicate with friends, collaborate on school assignments, play games, or even just to pass the time. Social media, which is popular among the public, especially teenagers, currently offers various features or facilities that give users the opportunity to document every aspect of their lives. The use of social media not only has positive effects on teenagers but also can have negative impacts on their lives. According to Juditha (2020), teenagers are more likely to be influenced by social conditions on social media, even if these conditions have negative effects on them. Despite its benefits, social media carries serious risks associated with its use, one of which is sexual harassment. Sexual harassment conducted through social media is considered an expression of someone's desires in an inappropriate and unwanted manner by the victim. This can cause physical and psychological health issues for the victim. According to Dowdell (2011), the easiest way for perpetrators to meet and involve children or teenagers in sexual harassment, pornography, or prostitution is through the internet.

METHODS

The approach in this study is qualitative. Qualitative research procedures involve descriptions of events being observed (Moleong, 2019). The data analysis technique begins with data collection, grouping, presentation, and analysis to draw conclusions (Creswell and Poth, 2018). This study also utilizes data from Internet and Social Media Statistics, Global Social Media Statistics, and Statistics from the Ministry of Communication and Information.
related to social media usage. The research involves the process of gathering observations that are turned into data about an event, detailing facts based on symptoms observed in detail in narrative form.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Social media is a digital platform that enables users to create, share, and exchange content and interact with others online. Social media encompasses various types of platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, TikTok, and YouTube. Each platform has different focuses and functions, but they all aim to connect people and facilitate the exchange of information. This aligns with Cahyono's (2016) view that social media is an online medium where users can easily participate, share, and create content, including blogs, social networks, wikis, forums, and virtual worlds.

Based on the survey results (Global Social Media Statistics, 2024), data published in the world's top platform ad resources reveals that YouTube has the largest social media advertising audience. The company's latest data shows that YouTube ads reach 2.50 billion users per month, which is more than 10 percent larger than the 2.24 billion reported by Meta for Facebook. Instagram has the third-largest advertising audience, with paid media placements on the platform reaching 1.69 billion users in April 2024. Meanwhile, Bytedance's tools indicate that TikTok ads now reach 1.58 billion users over the age of 18 every month. LinkedIn reports a global advertising reach of 1.07 billion, but it is important to highlight that this figure is based on the platform's total registered members and does not represent active monthly users. Additionally, Facebook Messenger is the only other platform outside of China to report a global advertising reach of over 1 billion users each month. According to Anggreiny & Sarry (2018), the Internet not only has positive impacts but also negative impacts, namely the misuse of internet usage. Researchers categorize internet misuse into two major types: abusing computer networks as a target, such as hacking (breaking into computer networks) and cyberterrorism (terrorism through the internet), and using the internet as a tool to carry out various deviant actions such as identity theft, pornography, and stalking others.

Social media should be a means of expanding friendships and finding information about things you like. However, there are some irresponsible individuals who actually use social media as a means to vent their sexual desires. Requests to communicate in a teasing and annoying way are an occurrence that often occurs in the context of social media use. This is similar to the whistling, words and touching that sexual harassers generally do in real life. Sexual harassment of teenagers can also occur on social media platforms. Sexual harassment via social media is an act related to immoral acts through information media and electronic transactions which can cause physical and psychological trauma. According to Cooper & Griffin-Shelley, the aim of someone committing sexual harassment via social media is for sexual pleasure and to be able to experience orgasm, either just by fantasizing through the mind or it can also be balanced by masturbating or masturbating (Sari & Purba, 2012). The same thing was also expressed by Suler that someone accesses things related to sex on the internet for reasons to satisfy their biological needs and to fulfill their psychological and social needs. Biological needs are sex itself, while psychological and social needs are the need to communicate deeply with other people about matters related to sex (Shvoong, 2011). Sexual harassment is any form of sexual behavior that is unwanted and disturbs the comfort or safety of the victim. In the context of social media, sexual harassment can occur in various forms, including: 1) The process in which the perpetrator builds a relationship and trust with the victim...
Social Media and the Risk of Sexual Abuse Against Teens
DOI: 10.26418/j-psh.v15i1.79830

to exploit them sexually (Grooming); 2) Sending sexual messages, images or videos without the recipient's consent (Non-consensual sexting); 3) Online stalking or harassment involving threats or intimidation (Cyberstalking); 4) Dissemination of someone's intimate photos or videos without permission, usually to take revenge or humiliate the victim.

Social media has characteristics that make it vulnerable to acts of sexual harassment. One of the main factors is anonymity, which allows perpetrators to hide behind fake identities. In addition, social media provides easy access for perpetrators to approach victims without geographical restrictions. Lack of supervision from parents also makes the situation worse, because teenagers are often unaware of the dangers that lurk. Statistical data shows an increase in cases of sexual harassment on social media. A study found that more than 40% of teenagers have experienced sexual harassment online. There were 281 cases recorded throughout 2019 while there have been 659 cases in the last 10 months alone. Recent research also states that most of the victims come from the younger generation. This can happen because most of those who use the internet are young people, either for work or study. Those who are vulnerable to becoming victims are women, namely 71% (Nurtjahyo, 2019). Some real-life cases, such as the unauthorized distribution of intimate photos or sexual threats via private messages, show how serious this problem is.

One can see that image-based sexual harassment—taking, sharing, or threatening to share personal and intimate images or videos without consent—was reported in most of the included studies, highlighting how image-based sexual harassment is used to blackmail, humiliate, or carry out emotional abuse (França & Quevedo, 2020; Jatmiko et al., 2020). Female survivors shared their experiences of facing threats or blackmail from their current or former partners for sharing intimate images or videos of them online (França & Quevedo, 2020). Intimate material is shared publicly on the internet or sometimes in closed groups. This kind of harassment and abuse is also carried out by known people, office colleagues, friends, and even family members. The negative impact this has on teenagers has made the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) feel anxious, so far the number of victims of pornography and online crime has been identified as 1,002 children. 28% of victims of online pornography, 21% of online pornography, 20% of child prostitution carried out online, 15% as objects of pornographic CDs and 11% of children are victims of online sexual violence, 24% of children have pornographic material (Hani et al. al., 2020).

Sexual harassment on social media can have a major impact on teenagers' mental and social health. Psychological impacts include depression, anxiety, and lasting trauma. Teenagers who experience sexual harassment also tend to experience social isolation, because they feel embarrassed or afraid to interact with other people. In addition, their academic performance can decrease due to the stress and emotional disorders they experience. To protect teenagers from sexual harassment on social media, collaborative efforts from various parties are needed. 1) Parents' Role: Parents must provide education about the dangers of social media and build open communication with their children. Monitoring social media use is also important to prevent unwanted interactions; 2) Role of Schools: Schools can organize educational programs on digital safety and provide psychological support for victims of sexual harassment. Equipping teenagers with the knowledge and skills necessary to protect themselves in the online world is an effective preventive measure; 3) Role of Social Media Platforms: Social media platforms must strengthen their security policies and technology. Easy and responsive reporting procedures are essential to help victims get the help they need quickly.
Legally, sexual harassment via social media is regulated in the ITE Law, the Pornography Law and the Criminal Code. Acts of sexual harassment are often included in Violations of Personal Data Protection which are regulated in the ITE Law. Juridically, laws and regulations regulate acts of sexual harassment via social media and violations of personal data protection as prohibited acts because they have binding legal consequences. Perpetrators can be punished on the basis of legislation, namely the ITE Law, the Pornography Law and the Criminal Code. It cannot be denied that social media has a huge impact on people's lives. Perpetrators of sexual harassment can easily commit their crimes via the internet. Although acts of sexual harassment are not limited to physical violence or rape, actions taken may reveal approaches regarding sex that may qualify as acts of sexual harassment. Therefore, victims of sexual harassment via social media may be at risk of experiencing physical and psychological health problems.

CONCLUSION

Social media has opened up new opportunities for sexual harassment against teenagers, with various forms and serious impacts. Awareness of these dangers and appropriate preventive measures are essential to protect adolescents from lurking threats. Collaboration between parents, schools and social media platforms can create a safer environment for the younger generation. In this way, we can ensure that social media remains a positive and beneficial space for youth development.

REFERENCES


Social Media and the Risk of Sexual Abuse Against Teens
DOI: 10.26418/j-psl.v15i1.79830


