




## Patterns of Child Grooming and Sexual Harassment in Online Games

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**Abstract:** *The purpose of this study is to discuss patterns of child sexual abuse that occur in the online games Minecraft and Hago. The crime of child sexual abuse with the "Online Child Grooming" mode in online games is regarded as an effective method for child predators to lure potential victims. Grooming is a process in which a perpetrator approaches a person or organization gradually through communication relationships with the intent of sexually harassing them. Victims are typically children, adolescents, or adults who are at risk of becoming harassed. This study employs activity routine theory, which assesses the absence of capable guardian factors, motivated actors, and the presence of suitable targets, all of which, if they occur at the same time and place, make child grooming possible. The research was conducted descriptively and qualitatively.*

**Keywords:** *Grooming, Hago, Minecraft.*

### INTRODUCTION

Sexual harassment of children, also known as "CSA" (Child Sexual Abuse), is a common occurrence in Indonesia. Harassment is increasingly occurring not only in the physical world but also in cyberspace and on other social platforms. According to the Indonesian Child Protection Commission

(KPAI), there were at least 168 cases of sexual harassment in 2016. The following year, the number fell to 142 cases, and in 2019, the number fell by another 134 cases (Nathaniel, 2019). Even though it has decreased, cases of crimes against children must always be minimized because children are the future generation of the nation. There are various types of child sexual abuse. A new form of child sexual abuse emerged some time ago in the form of online child grooming. Some Indonesians may be unfamiliar with the term "online child grooming," but this crime is serious and of great concern to several countries, including those in the United Kingdom.

Grooming is a process in which a perpetrator approaches a person or organization gradually through communication relationships with the intent to sexually harass them. Victims are typically children, adolescents, or adults who are at risk of becoming harassed. Meanwhile, online child grooming is a type of continuation or approach to grooming carried out on children using technology-based communication media for harassment, whether through social media, chat features, online voice games, or dating apps (Pollack, 2015). Child sexual abuse based on online grooming has now spread to Indonesia.

In 2018, the number of children in conflict with the law had the highest percentage, with at least 1,434 cases (with a percentage of 29.35%); in second place, there were around 841 cases (17.49%) related to child families and alternative care; and the protection of children exposed to pornography and cybercrime ranks third highest, with at least 679 cases (or around 13.89%). Child protection in terms of education ranks third with 451 cases or around 9.23%, followed by health and drugs (364 cases or 7.45%), trafficking and exploitation (329 cases (6.73%), social and children in situations of emergency 302 cases (6.18%), religion and culture 246 cases

(5.03%), civil rights and participation 147 cases (3.05%), and child protection cases ranking last with 76 cases or (1, 55%).

Meanwhile, according to [www.tek.id](http://www.tek.id), the number of gamers in Indonesia is expected to skyrocket. According to a study conducted by Pokkt, Decision Lab, and Mobile Marketing Association (MMA), the number of mobile gamers in Indonesia has reached 60 million. This figure is expected to reach 100 million by 2020. This is because game distribution is now available not only on game consoles but also on smartphones and tablets. Gamers can easily access and play a variety of games this way. Playing games has even become a routine activity for people of all genders and ages. According to the findings of a Pokkt, Decision Lab, and Mobile Marketing Association (MMA) study, the majority of smartphone activities are gaming (25%). They played mobile games for an average of 53 minutes. Other activities performed by smartphone users include social media (17%), video streaming (12%), browsing (10%), and online shopping (7%) (Maulida, 2018).

Indonesia is in a state of emergency when it comes to child pornography and cybercrime, and children are among the most avid users of online games. The large number of child players in online games, as well as chat and voice features, will make it easier for perpetrators to carry out their mode through child grooming (approaching with sexual intent after gaining the victim's trust), which is currently one of the modes of crime contributing to the rise in cases of abuse against children. When compared to other grooming cases on social media, the case of online child grooming through online games is still novel.

Smartphone users include not only the working class but also children. Smartphones have their worth and benefits for specific groups of people. However, there are numerous negative consequences of smartphone

use for teenagers, children, and even toddlers. One of the disadvantages of this smartphone is its security flaws, which can open the door to crimes against children (Puji Asmaul Chusna, 2017). Everything in a virtual society is mutually contradictory (constructive/destructive, moral/immoral, good/evil, truth/falsehood), and all of them can coexist. Words on screens are used to banter and debate, engage in intellectual discourse, trade, exchange knowledge, share emotional support, plan, brainstorm ideas, gossip, seduce, and create works of art in a virtual society. For them, the virtual world, particularly the world of online games, is a new environment. There are interesting foreign friends to make friends with whom they did not previously have in the real world. Because friends from online games with similar interests are thought to understand how they feel, Emotional feelings like sympathy, empathy, and the many similarities lead to a desire to interact directly, such as going on a date to meet in person, or at the very least a desire to interact repeatedly and become friends. However, it hurts those who did not previously have a filter. They can become easy prey for criminals who use cyberspace to carry out their activities. To gain the victim's trust, the perpetrators of this crime can pose as friends. Victims are frequently minors.

The high number of cases of sexual violence against children, according to Ratih and Daud (2015), prompted the Head of the National Commission for Child Protection to declare that Indonesia had entered an emergency period. Sexual violence against children is a heinous violation of human rights that must be classified as an extraordinary crime due to the impact it has had on the nation's generation. The long-term consequences of this sexual crime may include illness or psychological disorders in the future. As part of the science that studies crime, criminology should be able to provide solutions for preventing sexual crimes against children.

## **METHODS**

This study employs qualitative research methods. In general, qualitative research can be applied to studies of people's lives, histories, behaviors, organizational functionalization, social activities, and so on. This study, in particular, employs a descriptive research approach. Descriptive research is a type of study that seeks to describe existing phenomena, both natural and man-made. Forms, activities, characteristics, changes, relationships, similarities, and differences between one phenomenon and another are examples of phenomena (Sukmadinata, 2006). The author employs descriptive research to describe the phenomenon of online child grooming in the form of patterns in the online game applications Hago and Minecraft, which are interesting to investigate because the modes and patterns are new in Indonesia. (c) data collection – this subsection should describe the instrument(s) used to collect the data and the procedure followed in the collection of the data

Meanwhile, the research was conducted over six months, from January 2022 to June 2022. The research sites were divided into two categories: social media observation sites and online games on the internet. The Ministry of Social Rehabilitation Center in East Jakarta is the second location. Researchers used a literature study to collect data from various secondary sources such as journals, books, and online articles about a new mode of online grooming-based child sexual harassment via online gaming media that children frequently use. Furthermore, researchers interviewed both victims and perpetrators of online child grooming. The victim was met at East Jakarta's Ministry of Social Rehabilitation Center. At the same time, the perpetrators were interviewed over the internet in online game forums or on Instagram.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *The Application of Routine Activity Theory in Cases of Child Sexual Harassment via Online Child Grooming in Online Games*

Routine activity theory is frequently viewed solely as a victimization theory. This viewpoint appears to be incorrect because, according to Tillyer and Eck (2011), this theory can be used to explain changes in crime trends over time, as well as differences in crime rates between cities and various forms of crime, such as violent crimes or sexual crimes, in the online realm (Imran, 2015). So that routine activity theory can be applied to this study, the perception is equated that online games are a place or place where teenagers carry out their social activities such as interacting with other players. This social interaction happens daily, and it is the pattern that leads to the occurrence of crime.

### *Children as Appropriate Targets*

Children are an appropriate target here. Children make good targets because they can be easily manipulated. Many parents have given their children internet-connected devices in this increasingly sophisticated era. According to a study conducted by Lady Susan Greenfield, neurologist and professor of synaptic pharmacology at Lincoln College, Oxford, children who use internet technology excessively (addiction) experience inhibition in the form of attention. They are often impatient and confused about their identity. Furthermore, this technology affects critical reasoning attitudes. Because almost all information is readily available, children are less skilled and tend to focus on just one thing for extended periods. This makes solving short and complex problems difficult for children. Another risk that internet users' children face is the ability to communicate with anyone, at any time. The internet allows anyone, from favorite artists to criminals, to communicate with anyone else. As a result, children are more likely to become victims of crime. Children, due to their innocence, are easily

persuaded to reveal personal information, such as addresses and phone numbers, to people they have just met. Several cases of kidnapping and sexual abuse of children began with internet communication (Zarman, 2017). Children who play online games are a vulnerable target because, based on their daily activities, they frequently use the internet for a variety of purposes, including playing online games. The level of anonymity is higher, especially when it comes to online games; anyone can pretend to be someone who is not his true age.

***Motivated Offender: Online Game Users and Their Motivations for Child Sexual Abuse Online***

There is a chance that a crime will occur if a suitable target is not protected by a capable guardian. The final element in this image is the presence of the perpetrator. Routine activity examines crime from the perspective of the perpetrator. Only if the perpetrator believes the target is suitable and no capable guardian exists will the crime be committed. Their assessment of a situation determines whether or not a crime will occur (www.citynmb.com). Motivated actors emerge as a result of daily routine activities, in this case, playing online games. The average player in the game is a child, who is prone to manipulation, and online game security features, and parents, who are digital guardians and capable guardians here, if they do not carry out their functions, will create loopholes for crime. Possible perpetrators committed crimes for a variety of reasons. Us aspiring criminologists must understand some of them. The ability to analyze a situation from the offender's point of view will increase our effectiveness as crime reduction practitioners.

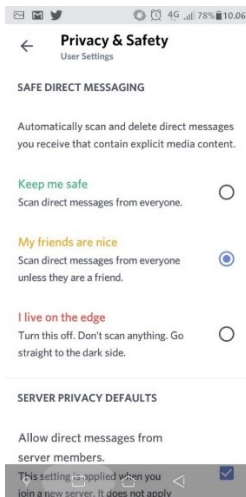
### ***Actors, Victims, and Child Grooming Online Mode Patterns in Minecraft and Hago Gamers Community Discussion Forums Feature Online Game Media***

Grooming appears to occur not only in online games but also in gamers' community forums. Discord is one of the most popular gaming community discussion platforms. Discord is a popular text, video, and audio chat application that can be found on computers, browsers, and mobile phones. These apps, which were created to allow video game players to communicate with one another, have gained popularity even outside of the gaming community. Discord's main feature is server chat rooms, where like-minded people can gather to play and chat about video games. Private servers may require a special invitation and password to join. For groups of up to ten people, private, individual chat functions are also available (Kramer & Porter, 2019). Users in Discord can create servers based on their preferences; servers can be game communities, friend communities, local communities, learning communities, artist and creator communities, and many other things. However, perpetrators of crimes take advantage of this function.

According to information obtained by Forbes, Discord has been the subject of several FBI investigations over the last two years. Forbes outlines a series of criminal events investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation since 2017 in a detailed report published on January 29, 2019. According to the Forbes report, the rapid growth of Discord users has led to a series of criminal behaviors, as the popularity of Discord is increasingly recognized by many. Forbes was able to reveal that the FBI was investigating a Discord group dedicated to cybercrime activity thanks to previously unreported court filings. Low-level hackers are using the app's groups to share stolen data, such as usernames and passwords, for drug trafficking, pornography, and so on. There are several channels that users can access in a



Discord group chat room server. All of this, however, is only possible if you follow the server's rules. Children who play online games want to make friends with others who have a similar interest in games. Discord is a popular application with many private servers and chat rooms where the gaming community gathers. Some people, however, use it incorrectly. US authorities have also issued warnings in several cases where the chat app has been hacked by groomers to target children who are vulnerable to online coercion (Brewster, 2019). This is because Discord's policies and protection are somewhat vulnerable. If the recipient activates the "I live on the edge" feature, anyone can send inappropriate messages and have them read by the recipient.



Picture 1: Screenshot of the Privacy and Security page: Direct Messaging via Discord Mobile

Child predators are notorious for making friends on online gaming platforms such as Discord before preying on vulnerable youths. There are numerous stories about online grooming via gaming platforms. The problem became so severe in 2012 that Microsoft, Sony, Disney Interactive Media

Group, Electronic Arts, and other companies agreed to close the accounts of over 3,500 registered sex offenders in New York, dubbed "Operation Game Over." According to several FBI cases, some adults used Discord to prey on children, lure them out, and then kidnap them for allegedly illegal purposes (D. Billy, 2019). Forbes discovered a previously unseen search warrant from 2017 detailing the case of William Lee Dela Cruz, 22, who used Discord to communicate with an unnamed 12-year-old. The government claims to use Discord to discuss sex and masturbation, among other things. According to a search warrant detailing subsequent sexual activity between the two, the chats came to light after Jane Doe was reported missing, having vanished with Dela Cruz in the vehicle. Dela Cruz was charged with approaching by luring a minor and traveling with the intent to engage in illicit sexual intercourse. He has not yet been tried. Just last week, the judge in the case ordered Dela Cruz to be hospitalized for up to four months for treatment, "until his mental condition improves and the trial can proceed." This is not the first-time grooming has been reported on the site. According to a Forbes.com report, six men and a woman were arrested in Florida early in January 2019 on suspicion of sexually exploiting two teenage girls. Police say the accused first contacted one of the girls via Discord, despite warnings about the platform's predatory use (Brewster, 2019).

Children and adolescents live in a digital world where online and offline distinctions do not always represent distinct social spaces (May-Chahal & Emma, 2023). Being a trusted adult is important not only in the principal's interactions with children but also with their families and in local communities like Discord. The abuse of trust that underpins the grooming process has resonance in the delivery of intimate and social relationships in a variety of contexts and through a variety of deceptive devices. According to Hudson, this may include coercion of the child or simply ensuring that no

one around the child will obstruct the abuser's approach to the child. The grooming process can take a short time or a long time to make the child feel comfortable (McAlinden, 2012). While some perpetrators focus on a single child (Gillespie, 2008), their patience can also be explained in part by the fact that they are not used to targeting or grooming multiple children at the same time. If the child becomes restless and disconnected, other victims could be targets. Sex offenders can also try out their grooming mode on these children to assess how the process works (McAlinden, 2012).

Another aspect of protecting children from online child sexual crimes is contained in the block and report features, which have recently been added to several game developers' games. One of them is the block and report feature found in the online game Hago. Hago is an online game application that is currently popular among all demographics, but a recent case emerged of the arrest of an online taxi driver who committed sexual harassment in the grooming mode of several children. Following up on this case, Hago collaborated with KOMINFO (the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology) to improve security through three actions in the Hago application chat room. To prevent this, three security measures were implemented: automatic blocking of the spread of numbers, reminders to maintain the confidentiality of personal data, and the failure to send images. similar incidents that jeopardize the comfort of players (Perwitasari, 2019). However, there is still a voice note feature in a room in the Hago application that groomers could use to approach child players. Unfortunately, the voice note feature is still widely used in applications and online games today, and the actors do not use it properly.

### ***Children's Vulnerability and Sexual Victimization in Online Grooming***

According to the concept of behavior proposed by **Bourdieu (2010: 18)** in **Palaloka (2013)**, students' online game consumption behavior is a

product of habitus (habits). A habit is a mental or cognitive actor that is used to deal with social situations. Actors have internalized a set of schemes or patterns that they use to perceive, understand, realize, and evaluate the social world. These patterns are used by actors to create and judge their actions, exactly like what students do. They play online games because it is a habit they have had since they were children. They are taught that playing is similar to playing on a video game console. Outside the house, you can play quietly without having to sweat or be dangerous. These habits in their lives are the result of a history. "Habitus is a product of history, as a set of dispositions that last a long time and are obtained through repeated practice (inculcation)," adds **Adib (2012: 97) (Pitaloka, 2013)**.

As a result of the culture of child consumerism and the many online marketing practices that target children as their market share, children are vulnerable to various crimes such as online bullying, identity theft, fraud, or sexual grooming from fellow game players who appear to be predators. According to research (Reddy & Minnaar, 2015) cyberspace is described as a place for various activities, both social and economic, but, like most of the technologies brought by the Information Age, it is also a place and facilitator of cybercrime. Depictions of sexually based virtual interactions (Baines, 2008) such as virtual rape and sexual coming-of-age games, have become a reality in recent years, highlighting that while such worlds provide entertainment for many children, they also put them at risk of online sexual harassment. The sophisticated and unique computer graphics inherent in cyberspace are frequently exploited by some for the creation and distribution of virtual life-like images of children in sexual situations, becoming another way for perpetrators to make money and increasing the demand for such material (Baines, 2008). In addition to virtual sexual harassment, virtual worlds can facilitate traditional forms of online sexual abuse. Many virtual

worlds include communication tools such as text-based chat, voice over real-time Internet Protocol (VOIP) chat, and video chat. It is a tool that perpetrators can use to facilitate traditional online types of sexual harassment, such as the exchange of sexual and photographic and video images of each other, and thus indirectly the virtual world serves as an "ideal" ground for the development and spread of child pornography, online solicitation that leads to on contact abuse (such as rape, sex tourism, and child trafficking), and exposing a child to sexual images or forcing a child to perform the act.

Children are vulnerable to victimization through virtual sexual abuse as well as more traditional forms of online sexual abuse. As a result, perpetrators can use all communication channels in virtual worlds to commit virtual sexual harassment and traditional online sexual harassment, which can and does lead to sexual harassment contact. The presence of high-demand offenders, as well as the absence of competent guards or other criminal constraints, is sometimes cited by criminologists as factors that serve as fertile ground for such abuse (Choo, 2009). Many websites in the virtual world offer a large number of games that can be played together online (multiplayer), such as [www.gemscool.com](http://www.gemscool.com) (the largest MMORPG-based games portal in Indonesia) and others. Online games are fertile ground here, as they allow perpetrators and victims to communicate with one another in their daily lives. As previously stated, voice chat and chat room features are available in online games. When the offender and victim meet in the same space and time by utilizing these features, a loophole opens up for groomers to approach their victims by running a grooming mode that can progress through the following stages: Establishment of friendship (friendship forming), the formation of new relationships, Risk assessment, Exclusivity, Sexual (Sexual), Fantasy enactment (fantasy enactment).

Groomers form bonds with younger gamers based on common experiences and use them to venture into more personal territory after defeating a difficult opponent or exploring a new level of play. Groomers frequently seek to isolate children by separating them from their parents and real-life friends by posing as "the only person who truly understands them" ([www.esafety.gov.au](http://www.esafety.gov.au)).

## CONCLUSION

According to the findings of this study, the online child grooming mode can occur after passing through six stages, the first of which is friendship formation, the second of which is relationship formation, risk assessment, exclusivity, and sexuality (Fantasy enactment). If the groomer creates these six stages, the grooming mode will run smoothly. Grooming can also occur as a result of cultural factors in child consumerism. According to UKKCIS (**United Council for Child Internet Safety, 2017**), smartphones appear to be a valuable commodity for children. This demonstrates that children are products of consumerism culture. One of the many online activities that children engage in is playing online games. Online games are a type of daily habit that children develop while using smartphones. This daily routine unknowingly appears to be a place where crimes can occur. If children and perpetrators of crimes meet in the same place and time without the presence of capable guardians and adequate digital guardians, this will create gaps in the vulnerability of child victimization to crimes with a sexual make-up mode. The gender in this study was male, which is consistent with previous research that found that the gender of perpetrators of sexual crimes was mostly male. The average age of online offenders is 35 years old, which is similar to the findings of a Babchisin meta-analysis comparing online and offline sex offenders, which

found that the average age of those who commit online sex crimes is 38 years old (Babchishin et al., 2011).

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