

Child Grooming and Sexual Violence in *Broken Strings*: Examining Patterns of Victimization

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ABSTRACT

Child grooming is a manipulative process through which perpetrators establish emotional trust with children to facilitate sexual exploitation or abuse. As a covert form of sexual violence that often occurs without physical coercion, child grooming presents significant challenges for legal recognition, prevention, and prosecution. This study examines the representation of child grooming in *Broken Strings* by Aurelie Moeremans and analyzes the adequacy of Indonesia's Law Number 35 of 2014 on Child Protection in addressing such conduct. Employing a normative juridical method with statutory and conceptual approaches, the study explores the patterns of grooming depicted in the narrative and evaluates the legal protections available to child victims. The findings reveal that grooming is characterized by emotional manipulation, exploitation of trust, psychological dependency, and unequal power relations, all of which constitute sexual violence despite the absence of physical contact. Although the Child Protection Law provides preventive and repressive safeguards for child victims, its implementation remains constrained by difficulties in interpreting and proving psychologically based grooming behaviors. This study contributes to the growing discourse on technology-facilitated and non-contact sexual violence by integrating literary analysis with legal evaluation, demonstrating how fictional narratives illuminate evidentiary gaps and highlighting the need for a more responsive child protection framework capable of recognizing and addressing psychological forms of sexual exploitation.

KEYWORDS *Child Grooming, Sexual Violence against Children, Legal Protection, Child Protection*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Child sexual violence remains one of the most pervasive human rights violations affecting children worldwide, with profound psychological, social, and legal consequences that often extend into adulthood. While public attention has traditionally focused on acts involving physical sexual assault, increasing scholarly interest has shifted toward the less visible process of child grooming, whereby offenders deliberately manipulate children through emotional bonding, trust-building, and psychological dependency before sexual exploitation occurs. Unlike conventional forms of sexual abuse, child grooming frequently develops gradually and without overt physical coercion, making it difficult for victims, families, educators, and legal authorities to recognize the abuse until substantial harm has occurred.¹

The expansion of digital communication technologies has further transformed the dynamics of child grooming by providing perpetrators with unprecedented opportunities to contact, manipulate, and exploit children across online and offline environments. Contemporary studies demonstrate that grooming is not merely an online phenomenon but a systematic process characterized by emotional manipulation, gradual desensitization, secrecy, isolation from support networks, and exploitation of unequal power relationships.² Research conducted across Europe, North America, and Asia consistently indicates that offenders employ sophisticated psychological strategies that reduce children's resistance while increasing emotional dependence on the perpetrator, often causing victims to perceive the abusive relationship as consensual or

¹ Samantha Craven, Sarah Brown, and Elisabeth Gilchrist. "Current Responses to Sexual Grooming: Implication for Prevention." *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice* 45, no. 3 (2006): 287–299. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2311.2006.00413.x>; Helen Whittle, Catherine E. Hamilton-Giachritsis, Anthony Beech, and Georgia Collings. "A Review of Online Grooming: Characteristics and Concerns." *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 18, no. 1 (2013): 62–70. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2012.09.003>

² Nuria Lorenzo-Dus, Andreas Kinzel, and Matteo Di Cristofaro. "Identifying Online Grooming Stages in Paedophile Chat Logs: A Linguistic Approach." *Journal of Pragmatics* 88 (2016): 10–30. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2015.09.004>; Grant M. Winters, Elizabeth L. Jeglic, and Lisa E. Kaylor. "Validation of the Sexual Grooming Model of Child Sexual Abusers." *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* 29, no. 7 (2020): 855–875. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2020.1801935>

affectionate despite underlying coercion.³ These findings suggest that grooming should be understood as a distinct form of sexual violence in which psychological control constitutes the primary mechanism of victimization.

Within legal scholarship, considerable attention has been devoted to evaluating legislative responses to child sexual exploitation and abuse. International legal instruments, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the Council of Europe Lanzarote Convention, recognize the obligation of states to prevent all forms of sexual exploitation against children, including preparatory conduct preceding physical abuse.⁴ Nevertheless, many national legal systems continue to prioritize evidence of physical sexual acts, resulting in limited recognition of grooming behaviors that rely primarily on emotional manipulation and psychological coercion. This evidentiary challenge often complicates criminal prosecution because grooming rarely leaves visible physical evidence despite producing substantial psychological trauma.⁵

In Indonesia, legal protection against child sexual violence has progressively developed through Law Number 35 of 2014 concerning Amendments to Law Number 23 of 2002 on Child Protection, together with subsequent legislative reforms addressing sexual violence.⁶ Although these regulations establish comprehensive protection for children against sexual exploitation, explicit legal recognition of child grooming remains relatively limited. Existing statutory provisions primarily focus on completed sexual offences, while psychologically manipulative behaviors that precede abuse are often interpreted indirectly through broader provisions on child protection and sexual exploitation.⁷ Consequently, law enforcement agencies frequently encounter difficulties in identifying, interpreting, and proving grooming conduct because psychological manipulation does not always satisfy conventional evidentiary standards applied in criminal proceedings.⁸

³ See Whittle, et al. "A Review of Online Grooming: Characteristics and Concerns." See also Sue Webster, Julia Davidson, Antonia Bifulco, Petter Gottschalk, Vincenzo Caretti, Thierry Pham, Jacqueline Grove-Hills, Caroline Turley, Charlotte Tompkins, Silvia Ciulla, Valeria Milazzo, Adriano Schimmenti, and Giuseppe Craparo. *European Online Grooming Project: Final Report*. (Brussels: European Commission, 2012).

⁴ Council of Europe. *Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Convention)*, 2007. <https://rm.coe.int/1680084822>; United Nations. *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. (New York: United Nations, 1989).

⁵ Catherine E. Hamilton-Giachritsis, Emma Hanson, Helen Whittle, Filipa Alves-Costa, Ana Pintos, Tracy Metcalf, and Anthony Beech. "Technology-Assisted Child Sexual Abuse: Professionals' Perceptions of Risk and Impact on Children and Young People." *Child Abuse & Neglect* 63 (2017): 142–161. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2016.11.006>

⁶ See Republic of Indonesia. *Undang-Undang Nomor 23 Tahun 2002 tentang Perlindungan Anak*. Available online at <https://peraturan.bpk.go.id/Details/44473/uu-no-23-tahun-2002>

⁷ Seno Adhi Wibowo, "Child Sexual Violence And The Violation of Human Rights: The Darkest Side of Law Enforcement in Indonesia." *The Indonesian Journal of International Clinical Legal Education* 2, no. 4 (2020): 421-434; Setyarini Nur Octaviana, "Child Sexual Abuse in Indonesia: History and Challenge in Legal Perspective." *Indonesian Journal of Criminal Law Studies* 4, no. 1 (2019): 83-92; Selviana Krismawati, et al. "Advocacy and Protection for Victims of Sexual Violence against Children: Insight from Indonesia's Experience." *Indonesian Journal of Advocacy and Legal Services* 5, no. 2 (2023): 207-240.

⁸ Yanuar Farida Wismayanti, Patrick O'Leary, Clare Tilbury, and Yenny Tjoe. "Child Sexual Abuse in Indonesia: A Systematic Review of Literature, Law and Policy." *Child Abuse & Neglect* 95 (2019): 104034. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2019.104034>

Previous studies have substantially contributed to understanding child grooming from psychological, criminological, and digital communication perspectives. Craven et al⁹ conceptualized grooming as a deliberate process involving offender strategies directed toward both child victims and their surrounding environment, emphasizing the calculated nature of offender behavior. Lorenzo-Dus et al¹⁰ further demonstrated how linguistic patterns and online interactions reveal systematic stages of manipulation employed by offenders in digital environments. Meanwhile, Hamilton-Giachritsis et al¹¹ examined the psychological consequences experienced by victims, highlighting the long-term effects of coercive emotional relationships established through grooming. While these studies provide valuable theoretical and empirical insights into offender behavior and victimization, they largely examine grooming through criminological, forensic, or psychological frameworks.

Conversely, literary scholarship has increasingly recognized fiction as an important medium for representing sexual violence, trauma, and unequal power relations. Literary narratives enable readers to observe subtle psychological processes that may be overlooked in legal documents or empirical investigations, thereby offering deeper understanding of victims' emotional experiences and perpetrators' manipulative behaviors. Existing literary analyses, however, predominantly examine trauma representation, gender-based violence, or abuse narratives without explicitly connecting literary representations of grooming to legal frameworks governing child protection. Consequently, relatively little research has integrated literary analysis with normative legal evaluation to assess whether existing legislation adequately addresses the patterns of victimization portrayed in fictional narratives.

This gap is particularly evident in studies concerning *Broken Strings* by Aurelie Moeremans. Although the novel presents a nuanced portrayal of emotional manipulation, trust exploitation, psychological dependency, and unequal power relations characteristic of child grooming, scholarly attention has largely focused on its literary dimensions rather than its implications for child protection law. The narrative therefore provides a valuable analytical context for examining how fictional representations may illuminate practical challenges encountered by legal systems in recognizing non-contact sexual violence and psychologically coercive behaviors.

Accordingly, this study seeks to examine the representation of child grooming in *Broken Strings* and evaluate the adequacy of Indonesia's Law Number 35 of 2014 concerning Child Protection in addressing such conduct. Employing a normative juridical approach supported by conceptual analysis, the research identifies the patterns of grooming depicted in the narrative and assesses the extent to which existing legal provisions provide preventive and repressive protection for child victims. By integrating literary analysis with legal scholarship, this study contributes to the growing body of interdisciplinary research on child sexual violence. It extends previous psychological and criminological studies by

⁹ See Craven, et.al. "Current Responses to Sexual Grooming: Implication for Prevention."

¹⁰ See Lorenzo-Dus, Nuria, Andreas Kinzel, and Matteo Di Cristofaro. "Identifying Online Grooming Stages in Paedophile Chat Logs: A Linguistic Approach."

¹¹ See Hamilton-Giachritsis, et.al. "Technology-Assisted Child Sexual Abuse: Professionals' Perceptions of Risk and Impact on Children and Young People."

demonstrating how literary narratives reveal evidentiary and interpretative gaps within child protection law, thereby providing insights for the development of a more responsive legal framework capable of recognizing psychological forms of sexual exploitation before physical abuse occurs.

II. ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPT OF CHILD GROOMING AND THE MODUS OPERANDI OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN IN *BROKEN STRINGS*

The concept of a criminal act within the Indonesian criminal law system originates from the Dutch legal doctrine of *strafbaar feit*, which refers to conduct that is punishable under criminal law. Contemporary criminal law scholarship, however, no longer regards a criminal act merely as a formal violation of statutory provisions. Rather, criminal liability requires the existence of both the prohibited conduct (*actus reus*) and the accompanying element of culpability (*mens rea*), together with the legal consequences arising from the commission of the offence.¹² Consequently, criminal acts encompass not only physical conduct but also intentional and psychologically manipulative behaviour capable of causing legally recognized harm.

This broader understanding is particularly significant in the context of child sexual violence. Children occupy a uniquely vulnerable legal position due to their developmental immaturity and limited capacity to recognize, resist, or report exploitative conduct. Accordingly, acts that interfere with a child's physical integrity, psychological well-being, or emotional development may constitute criminal offences, even where no immediate physical violence has occurred.¹³ Contemporary approaches to child protection therefore emphasize that psychological coercion and emotional manipulation may be equally harmful as direct physical abuse, particularly when such conduct facilitates subsequent sexual exploitation.

One emerging manifestation of child sexual violence is child grooming, a phenomenon that has become increasingly prevalent alongside the expansion of digital communication technologies and evolving patterns of social interaction.¹⁴ Child grooming refers to a deliberate and systematic process through which an adult establishes emotional trust with a child for the ultimate purpose of sexual exploitation. Unlike conventional sexual offences characterized by overt physical

¹² Jonathan Herring, *Criminal Law: The Basics*. (London: Routledge, 2021). See also Hamzah, Andi. *Hukum Pidana Indonesia*. (Jakarta: Sinar Grafika, 2017).

¹³ Ina Nur Fadhilah, and Junifer Dame Panjaitan. "Legal Protection of Children as Victims of Sexual Exploitation." *International Journal of Social Research* 2, no. 1 (2024): 1-10; Ulva Syakirohtul Rizkiyah, and Iqbal Kamalludin. "Fulfillment of Constitutional Rights for Child Victims of Sexual Violence in Batang Regency." *Asian Journal of Law and Humanity* 4, no. 1 (2024): 20-43. <https://doi.org/10.28918/ajlh.v4i1.2>; Mohammad Arinal Huda, "Sexual Harassment in Indonesia: Problems and Challenges in Legal Protection." *Law Research Review Quarterly* 7, no. 3 (2021): 303-314.

¹⁴ Gayatri Dyah Suprobawati, and Saiful Hamdi. "Human Rights and Cyber Child Grooming: Analysis of Indonesian Criminal Law." *International Conference for Democracy and National Resilience (ICDNR 2024)*. Atlantis Press, 2024. https://doi.org/10.2991/978-94-6463-634-5_7; Dian Ekawaty Ismail, et al. "The Comparative Study: Protecting Children's Rights Through Law Reform of Restorative Justice in Juvenile Cases." *Journal of Law and Legal Reform* 6, no. 2 (2025): 909-950.

force or intimidation, grooming is typically executed through subtle and progressive psychological manipulation. Its covert nature frequently prevents both victims and those within their social environment from recognizing the abusive relationship during its initial stages.¹⁵

Although child grooming does not necessarily involve immediate physical contact, it clearly demonstrates the existence of criminal intent (*mens rea*). The perpetrator intentionally exploits the child's emotional vulnerabilities, including the need for affection, recognition, security, and acceptance, to establish a relationship of dependency. Through repeated interactions, the offender gradually reduces the child's vigilance while creating the illusion of a caring and trustworthy relationship. Consequently, the victim often fails to perceive the relationship as exploitative despite the offender's calculated intention to facilitate sexual abuse.¹⁶

The relationship constructed through grooming is inherently characterized by unequal power relations. Adults possess significantly greater emotional, cognitive, and social authority than children, enabling perpetrators to manipulate the victim's perceptions and decision-making capacity. This imbalance is reinforced through continuous expressions of attention, praise, emotional support, and promises of protection, all of which foster psychological dependency. Such dependency enables offenders to exercise increasing control over the victim while simultaneously reducing the likelihood of disclosure or resistance. Accordingly, child grooming should be understood as a systematic and premeditated form of sexual violence in which psychological coercion functions as the principal mechanism of victimization rather than physical force.¹⁷

The grooming process commonly begins with the deliberate establishment of trust between the offender and the child. Rather than relying on intimidation, perpetrators consistently position themselves as dependable, caring, and emotionally supportive figures. By maintaining a continuous presence in the child's life, offenders seek to satisfy emotional needs that may not be adequately fulfilled by the child's family or immediate social environment.¹⁸ This stage is particularly

¹⁵ Anny Kim, Julien Chopin, and Eric Beauregard. "Tell Me What You Do, I'll Tell You Who You Are: Predicting Offender-Victim Relationships in Sexual Homicide." *Victims & Offenders* 20, no. 3 (2025): 511-531. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15564886.2024.2362177>; Elizabeth A. Armstrong, Miriam Gleckman-Krut, and Lanora Johnson. "Silence, Power, and Inequality: An Intersectional Approach to Sexual Violence." *Annual Review of Sociology* 44, no. 1 (2018): 99-122. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-073117-041410>

¹⁶ Susan Miller, *Victims as Offenders: The Paradox of Women's Violence in Relationships*. (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2005).

¹⁷ Sulvy Mandriyani, et al. "Child Grooming (Technology-Based Sexual Harassment) in the Context of Indonesian Law." *International Journal of Law, Environment, and Natural Resources* 4, no. 1 (2024): 91-101. <https://doi.org/10.51749/injurlens.v4i1.100>; Devi Tama Hardiyanti, Beniharmoni Harefa, and Handar Subhandi Bakhtiar. "Grooming Offences Against Children in Indonesia." *UUM Journal of Legal Studies* 14, no. 2 (2023): 557-579. <https://doi.org/10.32890/uumljs2023.14.2.6>; Kinanti Alysha Putri Haryanto, and Beniharmoni Harefa. "The Urgency of Child Grooming Regulation in the Legal System in Indonesia." *Al-Daulah: Jurnal Hukum Pidana dan Ketatanegaraan* 11, no. 2 (2022): 75-91.

¹⁸ Juliane A. Kloess, Anthony R. Beech, and Leigh Harkins. "Online Child Sexual Exploitation: Prevalence, Process, and Offender Characteristics." *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 15, no. 2 (2014): 126-139. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838013511154>. See also Laurie S. Ramiro, et al. "Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse: A Community Diagnosis Using the Social Norms Theory." *Child Abuse & Neglect* 96 (2019): 104080. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2019.104080>

significant because it establishes the foundation upon which subsequent manipulation and exploitation become possible.

As trust develops, the offender progressively strengthens the child's emotional attachment through continuous validation, praise, empathy, and reassurance. These interactions create a perception that the perpetrator uniquely understands and values the child, thereby fostering emotional dependency. In *Broken Strings*, this pattern is illustrated through the gradual fulfilment of the victim's emotional needs, resulting in an increasingly dependent relationship that diminishes the victim's ability to critically evaluate the offender's inappropriate conduct. Emotional dependency thus becomes an essential mechanism through which grooming facilitates subsequent sexual exploitation.¹⁹

Following the establishment of emotional dependency, grooming progresses into a stage of psychological manipulation designed to reshape the victim's understanding of the relationship. The perpetrator gradually persuades the child that their relationship is unique, exclusive, and misunderstood by others, thereby encouraging emotional isolation from family members and other sources of support.²⁰ In *Broken Strings*, this process is reflected in the victim's growing belief that only the perpetrator genuinely understands and accepts them. Such psychological isolation further consolidates the offender's influence while weakening the child's capacity to recognize manipulative behaviour.

A defining characteristic of child grooming is the gradual erosion of personal, moral, and social boundaries. Rather than introducing sexually explicit behaviour abruptly, perpetrators progressively normalize increasingly intimate interactions through incremental behavioural changes. Sexualized conversations, physical closeness, or emotionally exclusive relationships are introduced in ways that appear natural within the context of the previously established bond of trust. Because these behavioural changes occur gradually, victims often fail to recognize that accepted social and legal boundaries are being violated. In *Broken Strings*, this process is portrayed through the offender's transformation from a protective and supportive figure into an increasingly intimate presence while continuing to frame such behaviour as an expression of affection and care. This normalization of deviant conduct represents one of the defining characteristics of child grooming and explains why many child victims are unable to identify themselves as victims of sexual violence until the exploitation has already occurred.²¹

In addition, the perpetrator took advantage of the power relationship and personal closeness he had with the victim. This power relationship can arise due to differences in age, social position or certain roles that make the perpetrator have

¹⁹ María Reneses, María Riberas-Gutiérrez, and Nereida Bueno-Guerra. "“He flattered me”: A comprehensive look into online grooming risk factors: Merging voices of victims, offenders and experts through in-depth interviews." *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace* 18, no. 4 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.5817/CP2024-4-3>

²⁰ Kurnia Dewi Anggraeny, et al. "Cyber Child Grooming on Social Media: Understanding The Factors and Finding the Modus Operandi." *International Journal of Law and Politics Studies* 5, no. 1 (2023): 180-188.

²¹ Jasmine Fatiha Jamaila, and Yuliana Yuli Wahyuningsih. "Juridical Analysis of Child Grooming and Identify Forgery (Faker) in the Roleplayer Community on Social Media." *Journal of Law, Politic and Humanities* 6, no. 1 (2025): 447-456. <https://doi.org/10.32996/ijlps.2023.5.1.21>

greater influence over the victim.²² In *Broken Strings*, the power relationship creates an imbalance of position between the perpetrator and the victim, where the victim is in a weak position and does not have the capacity to refuse. This inequality strengthens the control of perpetrators and increases the potential for sexual exploitation.

Another defining characteristic of child grooming is the deliberate isolation of the victim from protective social networks. Perpetrators intentionally seek to weaken the child's relationships with parents, family members, peers, or other trusted adults who might recognize or intervene in the abusive relationship.²³ This isolation is achieved through various forms of psychological manipulation, including fostering distrust toward others, creating interpersonal conflict, or convincing the child that the perpetrator is the only person who genuinely understands and cares for them. By progressively limiting the victim's access to external sources of emotional support and guidance, the offender reinforces the child's dependence while reducing the likelihood that the grooming process will be detected or reported. In *Broken Strings*, this pattern is illustrated through the victim's increasing emotional withdrawal from their social environment, leaving the perpetrator as the primary source of trust, validation, and emotional security. The narrative demonstrates how social isolation functions not merely as a consequence of grooming but as a deliberate strategy that facilitates continued exploitation.

The final stage of child grooming involves the consolidation of the perpetrator's control through intimidation, psychological coercion, and victim silencing. At this stage, offenders manipulate the victim into believing that disclosure will result in negative consequences, such as punishment, rejection, or the destruction of the relationship upon which the child has become emotionally dependent. Feelings of fear, shame, guilt, and self-blame are systematically cultivated to discourage victims from reporting the abuse or seeking assistance. As a result, victims frequently internalize responsibility for the exploitation, despite the offender's intentional abuse of power and trust.²⁴ In *Broken Strings*, this process is reflected in the victim's persistent internal conflict, characterized by emotional attachment to the perpetrator alongside growing discomfort with the increasingly exploitative nature of the relationship. The narrative underscores that the harm caused by child grooming extends beyond the abusive acts themselves, producing enduring psychological trauma that impairs victims' autonomy, decision-making capacity, and willingness to disclose the abuse.

Furthermore, it can be understood that the *child grooming* does not start with violence, but with attention, validation and a false sense of security. The case experienced by Aurelie Moeremans is not a rare thing in Indonesia, but it is rarely talked about because it is often misunderstood. Many Indonesians still consider relationships with age differences to be commonplace. However, the essence of

²² Sylvia Dwi Andini, and Hana Faridah. "Tinjauan Kriminologi Mengenai Ketimpangan Relasi Kuasa dan Relasi Gender dalam Kasus Kekerasan Seksual." *JUSTITIA: Jurnal Ilmu Hukum dan Humaniora* 9, no. 5 (2022): 2279-2292. <https://doi.org/10.31604/justitia.v9i5.2279-2292>

²³ Elena Martellozzo, *Online Child Sexual Abuse: Grooming, Policing and Child Protection in a Multi-Media World*. (London: Routledge, 2013).

²⁴ Nuria Lorenzo-Dus, and Craig Evans. "'Not right now': Children's resistance during online grooming interactions." *Journal of Pragmatics* 249 (2025): 44-56. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2025.08.013>

grooming It itself is a deliberate emotional manipulation process by the perpetrator to the minor victim. Therefore, *grooming* is not a stand-alone event, but a phenomenon that is repeated and influenced by socio-cultural patterns in Indonesia, so it is often not recognized as sexual violence. This is because: *first*, the relationship between the elderly is often normalized on the basis of “consensual”; *second*, *grooming* often referred to as “dating” so that sexual violence becomes unrecognizable because an exploitative relationship is considered a romantic relationship, and the perpetrator is not positioned as the wrong party; and *third* the victim is asked to be “responsible” or *victim blaming*. Victims are often blamed for the violence, the victim is perceived as “too close”, “too open” or “hopeful” and even burdened with moral responsibility for the perpetrator’s actions.²⁵

Law Number 12 of 2022 concerning the Crime of Sexual Violence (TPKS Law) is an important milestone in the development of Indonesian criminal law because for the first time it presents a comprehensive regulation regarding sexual violence.²⁶ The arrangement includes not only physical acts, but also non-physical behaviors such as *grooming*. Through Article 15 of the TPKS Law, it is emphasized that the act of persuading, seducing, or manipulating children for sexual purposes, whether done directly or through electronic media, is qualified as a sexual crime. This arrangement reflects a shift in the legal paradigm that previously focused solely on physical consequences, towards a protection approach that emphasizes more on preventing sexual exploitation processes that are covert and psychologically impactful.²⁷

In addition, the Child Protection Law affirms the state’s obligation to ensure the protection of children from all forms of sexual exploitation. These provisions strengthen the position of *child grooming* As an act that has criminal law consequences and must be acted upon firmly, not just seen as a moral issue. A number of academic studies have also emphasized that legal approaches that criminalize preparatory acts has an important role in protecting children from structural vulnerabilities.²⁸

In an international context, the practice of *child grooming* has long been seen as a serious threat to the safety and dignity of children. This practice not only paves the way for sexual violence, but also often puts children in a position of

²⁵ Garazi Álvarez-Guerrero, et al. “Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse of Children and Adolescents with Disabilities: A Systematic Review.” *Disabilities* 4, no. 2 (2024): 264-276. <https://doi.org/10.3390/disabilities4020017>; Annie Yun An Shiau, et al. “Online Child Sexual Exploitation and the Role of Computer-Mediated Communication: A Scoping Review.” *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* 34, no. 5-6 (2025): 496-519. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2024.2388655>

²⁶ See Republic of Indonesia. *Undang-Undang Nomor 12 Tahun 2022 tentang Tindak Pidana Kekerasan Seksual*. Available online at <https://peraturan.bpk.go.id/Details/207944/uu-no-12-tahun-2022>

²⁷ Herli Antoni, Asmak Ul Hosnah, and Angelica Clara Anasztasia Simanjuntak. “Perlindungan Hukum bagi Korban Kekerasan Seksual pada Anak Berdasarkan Undang-Undang Nomor 12 Tahun 2022 tentang Tindak Pidana Kekerasan Seksual.” *Logika: Jurnal Penelitian Universitas Kuningan* 15, no. 2 (2024): 235-247. <https://doi.org/10.25134/logika.v15i02.10471>; Indah Sri Utari, Ridwan Arifin, and Diandra Preludio Ramada. “Exploring Child Grooming Sexual Abuse through Differential Association Theory: A Criminological and Legal Examination with Constitutional Implications.” *Volksgeist: Jurnal Ilmu Hukum dan Konstitusi* 7, no. 1 (2024): 69-88. <https://doi.org/10.24090/volksgeist.v7i1.9564>

²⁸ Clare McGlynn, and Rüya Tuna Toparlak. “The ‘new voyeurism’: criminalizing the creation of ‘deepfake porn’.” *Journal of Law and Society* 52, no. 2 (2025): 204-228. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jols.12527>

psychological and emotional vulnerability. Global awareness of these dangers has led to the birth of various international legal instruments, one of which is *Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse* or better known as *Lanzarote Convention* of 2007.²⁹

The Lanzarote Convention expressly obliges States Parties to criminalize any form of sexual approach or communication with children, including approaches through information and communication technologies. This means that the act can be punished even though it has not reached the stage of physical violence or sexual harassment. This approach shows a shift in the legal paradigm, from being reactive to more preventive by placing child protection as the top priority.³⁰ Although Indonesia is not yet a party to the Lanzarote Convention, this does not mean that Indonesia ignores the substance of the protections provided for in it. The values and principles contained in the convention are basically in line with Indonesia's commitment to protecting the rights of children from all forms of sexual violence. This is reflected in the development of national law, especially through the ratification of the TPKS Law.

The TPKS Law regulates more comprehensively various forms of sexual violence, including non-physical acts and carried out through electronic media. This arrangement reflects the state's recognition of the dangers of the practice *child grooming*, especially in the digital era that allows perpetrators to reach children more easily and secretly.³¹ Thus, although Indonesia has not ratified the Lanzarote Convention, the substance of the protection promoted by the convention has been internalized into national law as a form of state efforts to provide more effective protection for children.

Furthermore, various studies have shown that *child grooming* which only relies on a repressive approach has not been fully effective. The child protection system needs to be equipped with preventive measures, such as increasing digital literacy, strengthening early detection capacity and actively involving parents in supervising children's use of the internet. Therefore, the recognition *child grooming* as a sexual offense in Indonesia's positive law not only serves as a basis for punishment, but also as a public policy instrument that aims to strengthen child protection comprehensively.³² Thus, *Broken Strings* not only presents a personal story about the victim's experience, but also reflects the reality of *child grooming* as a hidden and complex form of sexual violence against children. The analysis of the concept and modus operandi of *child grooming* in this work is important as a basis for understanding that sexual violence against children does not always

²⁹ See Ziba Vaghri, et al. *Monitoring State Compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: An Analysis of Attributes*. (Cham, Switzerland: Springer Nature, 2022). <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-84647-3>

³⁰ See Soraya Espino García, "A new era for the rights of the child: the new "Rome strategy"(2022-2027): The Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse: "The Lanzarote Convention" as an instrument of protection." *VISUAL Review. International Visual Culture Review/Revista Internacional de Cultura Visual* 12, no. 4 (2022): 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.37467/revvisual.v9.3756>

³¹ Fitha Ayun Lutvia Nitha, et al. "Optimalisasi Implementasi UU TPKS: Tantangan dan Solusi dalam Upaya Penghapusan Kekerasan Seksual di Indonesia." *Masalah-Masalah Hukum* 53, no. 1 (2024): 90-100. <https://doi.org/10.14710/mmh.53.1.2024.90-100>

³² Azwad Rachmat Hambali, and Angreany Arief. "Reformulasi Kebijakan Pencegahan Pedofilia Berbasis Komunitas: Perspektif Hukum Pidana dan Perlindungan Anak di Indonesia." *Indonesian Journal of Legality of Law* 8, no. 1 (2025): 21-28. <https://doi.org/10.35965/ijlf.v8i1.7948>

appear in a visible form, but can take place through emotional relationships that seem normal but are full of exploitation.

III. CHILD GROOMING IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE CHILD PROTECTION LAW AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF LEGAL PROTECTION FOR VICTIMS

Child grooming as a form of sexual violence against children has serious legal implications, especially related to the state's obligation to provide protection to children as a vulnerable group. Children are not only seen as objects of protection, but as legal subjects who have fundamental rights that must be guaranteed and fulfilled. In the context of Indonesian law, the protection of child victims of sexual violence, including *child grooming* regulated in various laws and regulations with the Child Protection Law as the main legal instrument.³³

The Child Protection Law places children as legal subjects who have the right to live, grow and develop and to obtain protection from all forms of violence and exploitation. Article 1 number 15a defines that what is meant by violence is any act experienced by a child and has an impact on physical, mental or sexual suffering, including forms of neglect, threats, coercion or deprivation of children's freedom that are carried out illegally. This formulation shows that sexual violence against children is not limited to physical acts alone, but also includes acts that cause psychological suffering.³⁴

In context *child grooming*, a series of actions by the perpetrator that builds emotional closeness, creates dependency and manipulates the child's psychology can be qualified as a form of psychological and sexual violence. Although the term *child grooming* is not explicitly mentioned in the Child Protection Law, the characteristics of his actions have met the elements of sexual violence as referred to in Article 76D and Article 76E of the Child Protection Law, which prohibit anyone from committing violence or threats of violence, coercing, persuading, or engaging in deception against children for sexual purposes. The provision reflects the legal recognition of various modes of sexual violence against children, including manipulative practices such as persuasion, deception and a series of lies commonly found in cases *child grooming*.³⁵

The narrative in *Broken Strings* shows how the perpetrator does not directly commit sexual violence through physical coercion, but uses persuasion and

³³ Muhammad Rafifnafia Hertianto, "Tinjauan Yuridis Terhadap Perlindungan Anak dalam Ruang Siber di Indonesia." *Jurnal Hukum & Pembangunan* 51, no. 3 (2021): 555-573; Raden Ajeng Ferennata Aryaningrat Agistu, and Anak Agung Ayu Ngurah Tini Rusmini. "Perlindungan Hukum Terhadap Anak Sebagai Korban Kekerasan Seksual di Dunia Maya: Legal Protection for Children as Victims of Sexual Violence in Cyberspace." *Jurnal Hukum Pidana Indonesia* 2, no. 2 (2025): 120-135.

³⁴ Ahmad Jamaludin, "Age Verification Regulation in Social Media Platform Usage: Preventive Measures against Online Child Sexual Violence." *Jurnal Bina Mulia Hukum* 8, no. 2 (2024): 276-295. <https://doi.org/10.23920/jbmh.v8i2.1311>

³⁵ Dandi Ditia Saputra, et al. "Policy Crisis in Addressing Anonymity in Live Streaming Online Transactions: Sexual Grooming as a Modus of Child Exploitation." *ACOSEC: ASEAN Conference on Sexual Exploitation of Children*. Atlantis Press, 2024. https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-325-2_2

emotional manipulation as the main means. This pattern is in line with the formulation of Article 76E of the Child Protection Law which emphasizes the prohibition of the act of persuading or deceiving children to commit or allow obscene acts. Thus, the relationship described in *Broken Strings* can be understood as a concrete example of how *child grooming* works in practice and how the act has been included in the category of acts prohibited by positive law.

Furthermore, Article 59 and Article 69A of the Child Protection Law regulate special protection for child victims of sexual crimes. This protection includes handling efforts, medical and social rehabilitation, psychosocial assistance and protection in the judicial process.³⁶ In *Broken Strings*, impact *child grooming* Against the victim is not only reflected in the experience of sexual violence, but also from prolonged psychological wounds such as guilt, fear and emotional confusion. This condition shows the importance of implementing legal protection that does not only focus on punishing the perpetrator, but also on the recovery of the victim.

Furthermore, Article 59 and Article 69A of the Child Protection Law provide a firm legal basis regarding the state's obligation to provide special protection for children who are victims of sexual crimes. The protection is not only interpreted as a response after a criminal act occurs, but includes a series of comprehensive and continuous efforts. The form of protection in question includes initial treatment, medical rehabilitation to restore the physical condition of the victim, social rehabilitation to help the child return to function in his or her social environment, psychosocial assistance to overcome trauma and protection of children's rights during the judicial process.³⁷

This provision shows that the child protection law in Indonesia puts the best interests of the child as the main principle. Children who are victims of sexual crimes are seen not only as subjects who have violated the law, but also as individuals who need comprehensive recovery so that the negative impact of the crime does not continue into adulthood.³⁸ This approach has become particularly relevant in the context of crime *child grooming*, which generally causes psychological wounds that are more complex and profound than sexual violence that occurs suddenly.

In *Broken Strings*, the impact of *child grooming* on victims is portrayed not only through the experience of sexual violence itself, but also through the psychological conditions experienced by the victim in the long term. The victim shows feelings of guilt, constant fear and emotional confusion that make it difficult to distinguish between a safe relationship and a manipulative one. The psychological wound is a consequence of a gradual process of emotional manipulation, in which the perpetrator deliberately builds dependency and damages the victim's confidence. This condition confirms that legal protection for

³⁶ Yayan Agus Siswanto, and Fajar Rachmad Dwi Miarsa. "Upaya Preventif Sebagai Bentuk Perlindungan Hukum dari Kejahatan Kekerasan Seksual Pada Anak." *Jurnal Kolaboratif Sains* 7, no. 5 (2024): 1651-1667. <https://doi.org/10.56338/jks.v7i5.5313>

³⁷ I. Gede Ardi Wiranata, and AA Ngurah Oka Yudistira Darmadi. "Pengaturan Hukum Terhadap Pemberian Kompensasi Kepada Anak Korban dalam Tindak Pidana Kekerasan Seksual." *Jurnal Media Akademik (JMA)* 3, no. 7 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.62281/v3i7.2490>

³⁸ Putri Silvah Al Hikmah, Dinda Fajarohma, and Hana Sabilillah. "Perlindungan Bagi Korban Pelecehan Seksual dengan Pendekatan Keadilan Restoratif (Restorative Justice)." *Hakim: Jurnal Ilmu Hukum dan Sosial* 1, no. 3 (2023): 204-224. <https://doi.org/10.51903/hakim.v1i3.1248>

the victim's child *child grooming* cannot stop at the criminalization of perpetrators alone. Law enforcement that is only oriented towards punishment has the potential to ignore the main needs of victims, namely psychological and social recovery. Therefore, the implementation of Article 59 and Article 69A of the Child Protection Law is very important to ensure that the state is present not only as a party that punishes perpetrators, but also as an active party to ensure the recovery, protection and future of children who are victims of sexual crimes.³⁹

In the framework *criminal prevention*, crime prevention efforts are carried out by relying on the application of legal sanctions, the effectiveness and speed of their implementation and the strategy of forming public opinion in order to create a deterrent effect that is able to prevent crime. This prevention approach basically falls into two forms.⁴⁰ *First, general punishment* is a preventive effort that is oriented towards criminal acts in general with the aim of preventing criminal acts. This prevention is carried out through the formation of laws and regulations, criminal imposition and law enforcement against criminals. *Second, special punishment* is a form of prevention directed to prevent the recurrence of crimes by the same perpetrators. This approach is carried out by correcting the behavior of offenders, both through situational and social interventions with the aim of eliminating opportunities and means that allow crime to occur again.

The concept of criminal prevention shows that crime prevention efforts cannot be separated from the active role of the state as a responsible party in ensuring the protection of citizens' rights, including children's rights. The State as the party responsible for the fulfillment and protection of the rights of citizens, including children, has an obligation to ensure that children are free from all forms of violence, exploitation and discriminatory treatment.⁴¹ This obligation is constitutionally affirmed in Article 28B paragraph (2) of the 1945 Constitution which states that every child has the right to survival, growth and development and to obtain protection from violence and discrimination.

Principle *the best interest of the child* as reflected in Article 4 of the Child Protection Law is the main foundation in handling cases *child grooming* which states that: "Every child has the right to maintain his or her life and to have the opportunity to grow and develop optimally and participate appropriately in accordance with his or her human values and dignity, while at the same time being protected from all forms of violence and discriminatory treatment." This principle demands that every policy and legal action taken seriously considers the long-term impact on the child's development.⁴² In context *Broken Strings*, this principle is relevant to affirm that the victim's child *child grooming* cannot be positioned as a guilty party, but rather as a subject whose rights must be protected and restored.

³⁹ Pruntus Sudarmaji, and Muhamad Hasan Sebyar. "Perlindungan Hukum Bagi Anak Korban Kekerasan Seksual." *Journal of Law and Nation* 2, no. 4 (2023): 398-407.

⁴⁰ Idat Mustari Sutarya, Suryo Prastiono, and Ahmad Jamaludin. "The Law's Protection Against Children as Victims of Exploitation Artificial Intelligence-Based Cyberpornography." *Journal of Law, Politic and Humanities* 5, no. 5 (2025): 3473-3487. <https://doi.org/10.38035/jlph.v5i5.1725>

⁴¹ Afrisyal Chandra Permana, and Asmak Ul Hosnah. "Perlindungan Anak Sebagai Subjek Hukum: Tinjauan Terhadap Tanggung Jawab Negara dalam Perfektif HAM." *Al-Zayn: Jurnal Ilmu Sosial & Hukum* 3, no. 6 (2025): 9935-9946. <https://doi.org/10.61104/alz.v3i6.2716>

⁴² Yayan Sopyan, et al. "Child Exploitation by Parents in Early Marriage: Case Study in Cianjur West Java, Indonesia." *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga dan Hukum Islam* 7, no. 3 (2023): 1921-1942. <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v7i3.14804>

Through this child grooming case, it can be found that there is a gap in the public's understanding of forms of sexual violence against children. Although laws have provided for prohibitions and sanctions against sexual violence, the practice of child grooming is often not recognized as a criminal offense because it does not involve physical violence directly. This requires a broader and sensitive interpretation of the law to the development of modes of sexual crimes against children.

Therefore, legal protection for child grooming victims does not only depend on the existence of regulations, but also on the awareness and commitment of all parties in implementing the principles of child protection. The state has an obligation to ensure that existing regulations are truly able to protect children from all forms of sexual violence, including non-physical and manipulative ones such as child grooming. The phenomenon of child grooming in *Broken Strings* shows that the practice of child grooming is a real reality and relevant to the applicable legal provisions, so the implementation of legal protection for victims must be carried out comprehensively and oriented to the principle of the best interest of the child.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study highlighted that child grooming constitutes a distinct form of child sexual violence characterized by deliberate psychological manipulation, emotional exploitation, and the abuse of unequal power relations. As illustrated in *Broken Strings*, grooming is not an isolated act but a gradual and systematic process involving trust-building, emotional dependency, social isolation, boundary erosion, and victim silencing, all of which facilitate subsequent sexual exploitation. The findings reinforce the view that the absence of physical force does not diminish the gravity of the offence, as the psychological harm inflicted on child victims constitutes a serious violation of their rights to dignity, security, protection, and healthy development. By integrating literary analysis with normative legal inquiry, this study further demonstrates the value of fictional narratives in revealing patterns of victimization that are often difficult to identify through conventional legal evidence alone.

From a legal perspective, Indonesia's Law Number 35 of 2014 on Child Protection provides a normative foundation for addressing child grooming through provisions prohibiting sexual exploitation, deception, and other forms of abuse against children, despite the absence of an explicit statutory definition of grooming. However, the covert and psychologically coercive nature of grooming presents significant challenges for legal interpretation, evidentiary assessment, and effective law enforcement. These findings highlight the need for a child-centred interpretation of existing legal provisions and for future legislative and policy reforms that explicitly recognize grooming as a preparatory form of sexual violence. Such an approach would strengthen preventive strategies, improve victim protection, and enhance the capacity of the criminal justice system to respond to non-contact forms of child sexual exploitation before physical abuse occurs.

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The authors declare that generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used solely to assist in improving the clarity of language, grammar, and the organization of the manuscript during the writing process. The AI tools also supported preliminary drafting and language refinement under the direct supervision of the authors. All substantive intellectual contributions, including the conceptualization of the research, legal analysis, interpretation of data, critical evaluation of the literature, and formulation of arguments and conclusions, were undertaken exclusively by the authors. Every AI-assisted output was carefully reviewed, verified, and substantially revised to ensure its accuracy, originality, and compliance with academic and ethical standards. The authors accept full responsibility for the content of this manuscript, including the accuracy of all citations, interpretations, and conclusions presented.

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