

Conference Paper

Sexting: Sexual Harassment on Instagram During Covid-19 Pandemic

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ORCIDDyan Paramitha Darmayanti: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1901-5742>Nurul Ilmi Idrus: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0528-0983>**Abstract.**

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought changes to various aspects of human life. To prevent and stem the spread of the Coronavirus, the government took a series of measures aimed at limiting people's mobility and interaction. One of them is the work-from-home policy which eventually caused many activities to shift from face-to-face to online, including everything to be done remotely. With the increased use of social media, online violence, including sexting, also increased dramatically. While some existing publications discuss sexting between couples, this article focuses on sexting between people who are not dating, either do not know each other or only know each other but do not communicate intensely often. The research was conducted using a qualitative approach on the social network Instagram. As a combined data collection method, in-depth interviews and online observations were conducted. The study involved 10 women who experienced sexual harassment through messaging or in this study referred to as sexting. They differed in age and profession. This research shows that sexting can affect both men and women, however, the most likely victims are women. Forms of sexting are the perpetrator showing his genitals, inviting for intercourse by sending messages via Instagram, inviting to watch the perpetrator masturbate, and inviting the victim to exchange photos via messages on Instagram or via videocall. The more the victim ignores the person during sexting, the more the perpetrator feels challenged. Victims of harassment in the case of sexting on Instagram often experience mixed feelings of fear, shame, confusion, and shock. As a result, they are afraid to open social media, feel inferior, and even traumatized when meeting new people on Instagram.

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1. Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed many aspects of human life into an almost all online life to restrict human movement in order to prevent the spread of virus. During the Covid-19 pandemic, it was not only selling online which was increasingly mushrooming, virtual or online meetings were also more often carried out, even the use of social media, such as Instagram, Tiktok, Twitter, and Facebook, was also increasing. This

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indirectly has an impact on the increasing number of online gender based violence (KBOG), especially violence against women.

The SAFEnet 2021 Press Release document shows that during the Covid-19 pandemic the number of OBGV increased by three times. This is intertwined with Komnas Perempuan's annual record released on March 5, 2021, that in 2019 there were 241 KBOG cases. This number increased to 940 cases in 2020 [1].

According to the Head of Komnas Perempuan, Andy Yentriyani, women are often the main target of KBGO actors because gender construction in society often places women in a position that is easily deceived and pressured [2]. The forms of online gender-based violence are varied from gender-based harassment, seductive behavior, sexual bribery, coerced sexual offenses, scamming, body shaming, and sex texting (sexting). Rey et al. [3] define sexting as "the exchange of sexual content material via technological devices", and classify it into primary and secondary secondary sexting.

Sexting is an activity in which a person sends, receives or replies to messages containing sexual content in the form of text, photos or videos via smartphones, computers or other digital devices, "sexting" itself is a combination of the words "sex" and "texting" [4,5]. Sexting itself is used through various messaging apps and social media such as WhatsApp, Telegram, Facebook, Line, Instagram, Twitter, etc.

Instagram is currently one of the social media with the highest number of users after Whatsapp[6]. The most common form of sexting is direct messages on Instagram or video calls. This is because from a privacy perspective, Instagram is more accessible to other people than Whatsapp, so that in the context of sexting, it is easier for people to do it through Instagram than through Whatsapp.

Basically, sexting has significant benefits in a husband and wife relationship, especially in building chemistry even though they are far apart [7] but sexting can also be an act of sexual harassment if done without consent or forcing the other party to engage in the activity.

While some existing literature discusses sexting between those who are in a relationship or close relationships [8–10] this article focuses on sexting between those who are not at all in a relationship, both between two people who are completely strangers to each other, or between those who know each other, but the perpetrator pretends to be someone else by using a fake account.

2. Method

Using qualitative approach, this research was conducted virtually on Instagram social media. We use interviews directly or through several communication media, such as Whatsapp video calls, Google Meet, and Zoom, as well as online observations as a combined data collection method. Although sexting can be done by men against women and vice versa, all sexting actors in this study were men. Those involved in this study were ten women who considered themselves as the victim of sexting. They vary by age (between 17 and 30 years) and occupation (high school and university students, civil servants, to private employees).

3. Result and Discussion

During the Covid 19 pandemic, sexting became one of the sexual harassment that took quite a lot of victims. The Covid 19 pandemic that occurred not only made the increase in community activities change to all online but also changed the way people interacted with each other which ultimately had an impact on the high number of online sexual offenses, one of which was sexting[11–13].

In sexting relationships, especially in husband and wife relationships, it can increase the occurrence of harmonious relationships, but in other relationships caution is needed[4,14,15]. All parties involved in the sexting relationship need to have very clear consent to avoid sexual harassment, because in sexting if it occurs without consent it will be a form of sexual harassment.

The results show that sexting is carried out by people who are completely stranger to the recipient and by people who are known, even though they are not close to each other, some are followers on Instagram, others are not. Sexting is generally done by several people on the basis of mutual liking between the sender and the recipient, but there is also texting that causes the party to be sent to become a victim of texting. This was also explained by D (26 years old), one of the informants:

At first I didn't know who was doing the video call on my Instagram so when I wanted to receive the call, the call stopped so I no longer cared about the call. But some time I checked there was a message from someone I didn't know, I was very surprised, I was shaking because the message contained a picture of a penis with the message do you like it?

The same thing was also explained by B (20 years old) ?

When I was relaxing suddenly there was a new message sent by my senior at college, he asked if I was doing something not because there was something important that I wanted to get to. After that I said that I was free, then he made a video call and he was sighing while calling my name, not only that he also told me to see him masturbating. I immediately turned off the phone and cried, I was shocked and wondered why I felt guilty when I didn't do anything

As explained above, sexting is not only done by anonymous perpetrators but can also be done by perpetrators who know their victims even though they are not too familiar. Sexting in Instagram occurred in two ways, namely: first, sending a text message containing a direct invitation to have sex after the sender sends a photo of his genitals (penis); ask the recipient to send photos of their body parts as a whole, as well as certain sensual body parts, such as breasts, genitals; invites to do video call sex (VCS), either by inviting them to do it together or by simply inviting the recipient to "enjoy" online masturbation by the perpetrator; second, sending a picture or photo message that shows the perpetrator's genitals and invites the recipient to "enjoy it" with "fishing" questions, such as "Are you interested?" or "Do you like it?", and the sender expects a positive response from the recipient.

The response of the recipient, who felt as a victim of sexting, varied from feeling shocked, crying, embarrassed, confused, blaming himself. There are also those who respond silently for fear of being stigmatized. When the recipient does not respond or is slow in responding to text messages or picture messages sent by the perpetrator, the perpetrator will be increasingly challenged and eager to continue the text or action, such as sending spam chats or even contacting the victim continuously via voice call or videocall on Instagram. Therefore, there were victims who turned off their cellphones, deactivated their Instagram accounts, or blocked the perpetrators.

There were also those who tried to find out about sexting actors through social media, or asked for help from technological experts to find the data used to create Instagram. However, the result is quite shocked because the perpetrator was a person who was known in real life even though he was not familiar and his appearance is quite religious, as a symbol to cover his behind-the-scenes activities.

The impact experienced by victims of sexting is that they feel afraid of further terror and fear of being stigmatized that the victim is the one who "stimulates" the perpetrator through her posts on Instagram. There are also those who are traumatized to accept new friends on Instagram, and lost self confident to post her pictures like they used to be. There are even those who prefer to temporarily close their account or permanently

close their account, or no longer use social media, especially Instagram for an uncertain period of time.

This was also discussed by A (19 years old):

This is the first time i have been a victim of sexual harassment, especially related to sex. I got a chat inviting me to have sexual intercourse in a place where the perpetrator was an acquaintance of mine but not too close, when i first read the message i just thought it was a joke but once the perpetrator sent a short video masturbating it made me very surprised and felt guilty about myself. Honestly until now i feel traumatized to get to know or make friends on all social media, especially instagram.

Based on the explanation above, it can be understood that sexual harassment through sexting on social media can harm the parties involved and is dangerous for the wider community, especially for victims [16–18]. Victims of sexting harassment will experience prolonged fear and a sense of trauma, not only that the long-term impact on the social interactions they do, especially towards new people, also affects. They tend to feel afraid to get to know or be close to new people especially if the person wants to make friends on social media, one of which is Instagram.

In addition, sexual harassment through sexting does not only affect the victims of harassment but can also perpetuate the existence of a toxic online culture that can damage the safety of social media, even the trust of expression.

There are many things that can be done to avoid sexual harassment perpetrators, for example by not sharing personal information with others, even basically education also contributes, for example by fostering an understanding of responsibility in doing social media. In addition, every social media platform, especially Instagram, should also participate by implementing a reporting mechanism, and be more responsive if there are cases of harassment.

In the end, all forms of sexual harassment including sexting not only require individuals to take better care of themselves but also demand a joint commitment in forming a safe digital environment and mutual respect in using social media.

4. Conclusion

Sexting is a form of online sexual harassment on social media, including Instagram. Sexting sexual harassment can have a variety of impacts both in terms of mental and emotional health of the victim. So to protect yourself or to prevent becoming a victim of harassment, one of which is sexting, it is very necessary to maintain personal privacy by not sharing personal information in any form to other people. Online sexual

harassment, such as sexting can occur without clear consent from either party and this is increasing as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic where almost all sectors are turning online, including online interactions. . Victims of sexting sexual harassment when they experience it will be shocked, cry, feel embarrassed, confused, and blame themselves. When the victim does not answer or responds slowly, the perpetrator may send spam chats or repeatedly call or video call the victim. Some victims even try to track down the abuser through social media or seek help from tech experts to find the data used by the abuser on Instagram

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