

Research Article

The Critical Role of School Environment in Preventing Online Gender-Based Violence

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Abstract.

Data from the UN Women for the Asia Pacific region in 2021 showed that more than 88% of women in this region had experienced violence in cyberspace. UN Women also claimed that there has been an increase in cases of Online Gender Based Violence (OGBV) during the COVID-19 pandemic due to internet usage, which increased dramatically when countries imposed lockdown policies. We argue that OGBV is preventable by using various approaches and involving different actors simultaneously. In this case, we argue that the school environment plays a critical role in preventing gender-based violence, including OGBV. This research was based on community service activities that were carried out in one of the senior high schools in the Riau province. From these activities, we observed that understanding of gender and gender-based violence in schools is low in spite of this concept being the basis for understanding how to prevent gender-based violence in any form. We recommend that schools adopt interventions that include the whole school community, from students, teachers, staff, student organizations, and parent-teacher associations. The school-based interventions can range from developing proactive policies and strategies to educating on internet security.

Keywords: gender based violence (GBV); online GBV; gender inequality; school-based intervention

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1. Introduction

The growing rates of cybercrime against children have been very alarming. According to the data from the 'Why Children Are Unsafe in Cyberspace' report (1), 72% of children have at least been a target of one type of cyber threat. These threats include unwanted pop-up ads (47%), inappropriate images or content (36%), bullying or harassment (19%), unwanted sexual approaches (17%), hacking, and phishing (17%). The report surveyed parents and children from 24 countries worldwide and showed one concerning issue. 83% of children surveyed said they would seek help from their parents if they faced dangers while using the Internet. However, only 39% of parents claimed to have received complaints from their children regarding online threats. These statistics imply

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the possibility of underreported cases due to the unwillingness of children to speak about their bad experiences to their parents.

Indonesia is one of the countries with higher Internet penetration (the worldwide average is 64.5%; Indonesia is 66.5%) (2). There are 224.01 million Internet users in Indonesia in 2022 (3), which implies more than half of the population have access to the Internet. Internet reach out to children aged 12-17 is also strikingly high. A joint report from ECPAT, INTERPOL, and UNICEF (4) claims that 2020 internet penetration rates among Indonesians aged 12-17 were 92%. This report also discloses that children have accessed the Internet at least twice daily from their homes, schools, and Internet cafés.

While the report shows us children's harmless online activities, from using the Internet for school work and talking to friends and family members to playing online games, the report exposes the dark side of the Internet that poses dangers to children. The report reveals that around 500,000 Indonesian children claimed to have been sexually exploited online, either through blackmail, sexually groomed in return for money or gifts, or distribution of intimate images without their consent. The report shows that most perpetrators are close to the victims (a friend or a family member). What is worrying is that the number of victims of online threats might not portray the actual condition since victims chose not to report the case to the police even though the courage to speak up and go to the authorities is part of the efforts to break the chain of sexual violence.

The paper investigates cybercrimes through the gender perspective. The authors conform to the argument that most online threats and cybercrimes are just the continuation of gender-based violence (GBV) in the real world where the perpetrators use information and communications technology (ICT) to disparage the victims (5–7). Thus, the root of online threats that target someone or a group based on their gender, also known as online gender-based violence, lies in gender inequality and the belief that violence against some gender groups is acceptable. The authors recommend the whole-school intervention where all parties, from the teachers, students, staffs, and parents should contribute to reduce gender violence. The authors also believe that parents, teachers, and caregivers are responsible for creating a safe space for them in cyberspace. Apart from ensuring the readiness of legal instruments and developing products and services that are safe for children, empowering children, parents, and educators with knowledge about cyber crimes and how to prevent and protect them is also an important step to take. In the case of cybergrooming, for example, Dorasamy et al. (8) argue that there are three prevention steps to take: 1) The role of parents supervising the children; 2) Parents' initiative to take necessary action to keep their children

away from cyber crimes; 3) Commitment to impose internet usage limitations for their children. Teachers should also take part in keeping children away from cyber threats. Bullying, which no longer only occurs in the real world, can also occur in cyberspace. Teacher intervention is certainly needed when students report these actions (9,10).

This research has been part of the research and community service project that the authors instigated in July 2023. Funded by the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Riau, the authors visited Bengkalis Island in August 2023 to socialize online GBV to high school students at SMA 1 Bantan. Based on focus group discussion and survey distributions to the students, the authors recommend that apart from continuing to raise awareness on the danger of cybercrimes to children, it is necessary for schools to take a proactive policy to combat gender violence, from creating a better support system for the victims of GBV, to implement a gender-based curriculum. While the literature on gender-based curricula in Indonesia is growing (11–14), research on school-based intervention to prevent gender-based violence is still understudied. Thus this paper aims to initiate the discourse on the urgency of school prevention to stop gender-based violence.

2. Research Method

The community service that the authors initiated included pre-tests and post-tests to measure the students' basic knowledge of gender and gender-based violence and types of online gender-based violence. The authors built questions on online violence from cases reported to *Komnas Perempuan* (Indonesia's National Commission on Violence Against Women). In 2017, *Komnas Perempuan* received cases of eight varieties of online gender-based violence: cyber grooming, cyber harassment, hacking, illegal content, infringement of privacy, malicious distribution, online defamation, and online recruitment (15).

Based on those incidents, the authors narrowed the cyber violence to:

1. Cyber grooming, which is the process of building an emotional connection to a younger person where the usually much older perpetrator aims to exploit or abuse the victim.
2. Cyber hacking, which is compromising someone's or an organization's computer systems.
3. Cyberstalking, which is the obsessive use of ICT to put someone in emotional distress through harassment and persecution.

4. Cyber flashing, which is the act of using ICT to send someone obscene images and videos.
5. Impersonating, which is the act of stealing someone's identity to deceive other people.

In addition to the presentation about online gender-based violence, the authors conducted a focus group discussion with the students to explore their perception of it.

The authors then distributed an online survey to 71 students in the same age range. The purpose of the survey was to determine the students' online activities and the parental control of students' internet usage. The questions on the survey ranged from asking about the students' online habits, such as time spent on the Internet, types of social media they use, and types of unpleasant experiences while using the Internet. On parental control, we asked about their parent's financial support to use the Internet, rules on Internet usage, and whether their parents checked their mobile phones or oversaw their Internet time. The authors developed these questions from a survey conducted by *Komisi Perlindungan Anak Indonesia* (Indonesia's National Commission for Child Protection) in 2021 (16).

For analysing the survey and FGD results, the authors depended on secondary data from publications by government agencies, such as the Ministry of Women Empowerment and Children Protection and the Ministry of Education, to international organizations, such as UN Women and UNICEF. The authors also collected data from non-government organizations as well as the media.

3. Result

Overall, the authors claim that based on the pre-test and post-test results, the community service activities have improved students' understanding of gender and online gender-based violence (Table 1). In the pre-test, most students associated gender with the biological differences between males and females. Moreover, not all of them were accustomed to the definition of gender, where the social environment plays an essential role in shaping the roles and behaviors of men and women. The pre-test also showed that more students associated violence with physical and sexual violence, whereas gender-based violence covers verbal and socio-economic violence.

While students were unaware of the definition of gender-based violence and types of gender-based violence, most students agreed that women are the most vulnerable group to gender-based violence. On the types of online threats and cybercrime, it can

TABLE 1: Number of Students Who Gave Correct Answers.

No.	Questions	Pre-test	Post-test
1.	Definition of gender	17	55
2.	Types of gender-based violence	26	56
3.	Definition of online gender-based violence	29	36
4.	Women as the vulnerable group to become the victim of gender-based violence	59	60
5.	Definition of cyber grooming	22	58
6.	Definition of cyberhacking	58	59
7.	Definition of cyberstalking	25	47
8.	Definition of cyber flashing	28	47
9.	Definition of impersonating	19	41

be seen that most of the students were more familiar with cyber hacking than the rest of the online threats. The pre-test results showed fewer students were acquainted with cyber grooming, cyberstalking, cyber flashing, and impersonating. Since the authors followed up the pre-test with a short talk about types of online gender-based violence, there was an upward trend in students' awareness that other types of cyber crimes exist, as shown in the post-test results.

During the focus group discussion, the students responded well to awareness videos on cyber grooming, cyberstalking, and cyberbullying that the authors played beforehand. After watching several cybercrime scenarios, students could explain how cyber crimes happen and what makes someone a target of cyber crimes. They also can identify the negative impacts caused by cyber crimes, such as stress, insecurity, and being overwhelmed with guilt. Moreover, they acknowledged that most online gender-based violence victims are women. For them, this was because women use social media more than men. Their following argument was that women have flawed characteristics, such as low self-esteem, which makes them easy targets for online fraud.

Regarding the online survey, most students (98.6 %) said they own a mobile phone with a connection to the Internet. Around 58.6% claimed to spend less than 5 hours daily using the Internet, while 40% spent 6-10 hours. All students confessed to owning social media accounts, with Instagram (55.1%) and TikTok (31.9%) as the most favorite social media channels. Concerning horrible Internet experiences (Figure 1), half of the students declared never to experience unpleasant things online. The rest revealed various unpleasanties, from exposure to indecent and gambling ads (25.7%), obscene images and videos (10% and 2.9%), being extorted for money (20%), forced to send

photos and videos (4.3% and 2.9%), stalked and bullied (4.3% and 10%), and invited to meet a stranger known on the Internet (12.9%).

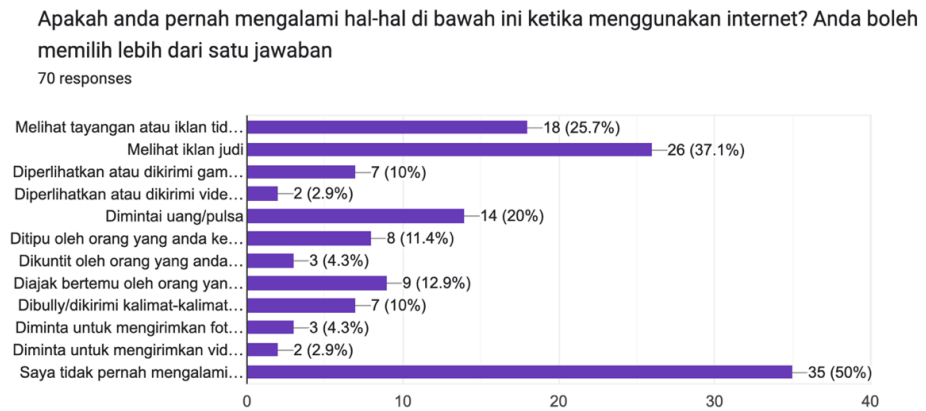


Figure 1: Results on Bad Experiences While Using the Internet.

Regarding parents' involvement, the survey results show that parents were aware that their children are active online. Half of the students (51.5%) said that they received around 10-15 thousand rupiahs per week from their parents to buy internet quota, while fewer of them claimed to spend 50-100 thousand to go online. The results on parent control showed that most parents imposed rules on how much time the students could spend on the Internet. Most of the students (84.1%) also claimed that their parents oversaw their activities while using the Internet. However, their parents were lenient in checking their mobile phones from time to time.

4. Discussion and Analysis

4.1. Analysis of the Survey and the FGD Results

The students' answers raise some critical points. First, their limited knowledge of gender as the biological sex differences parallel their lack of understanding of gender-based violence. The author argue that it is essential for the student to fully comprehend what gender is and how gender norms contribute to gender-based violence. Gender, defined as "the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female" (17), are norms that have influenced the distribution of resources and rights. Often, women and men receive unequal treatment because their society values men more than women. This marginalization of women and other minority groups often leads to normalizing violence and abuse against them (18). The types of violence are not always

physical, where the perpetrators intentionally attack and hurt their victims. They can be economic violence, where the offenders control the victims' financial resources; psychological violence, where victims live in fear because of threats and intimidations; or sexual violence, where the perpetrators coerce their victims into sexual acts without their consent (19).

Second, while the students knew that women are disproportionately affected by GBV, their arguments were somewhat misleading and the misconceptions about gender arguably might shape the students' opinions. While low self-esteem is a universal problem for both sexes, the students' reason that women suffered from self-esteem reflects their poor knowledge of how sociocultural factors determine gender differences and affect self-esteem for both men and women. The relationship between gender differences and self-esteem has been extensively studied. For example, in their cross-cultural study, Bleidorn et al. (20) concluded that apart from biological factors, cultural influences also play an essential role in shaping self-esteem in men and women.

On the issue of social media usage, the claim that men use social media less than women is not entirely valid. The data shows that in January 2021 in Indonesia, men used social media more than women (54% to 46%) (21). Men aged 25-34 are the most significant social media users (19.3%), followed by men aged 18 to 24 (15.9%). It is true, however, that in the age bracket of 13 to 17, women use social media more than men (6.8% to 5.7%). There is also the fact that Instagram users aged 13-17 are primarily women (7.3% to 4.9%) (22).

Third, their answers regarding their online activities conform to the intensive Internet penetration in Indonesia. It is important to reiterate that the high school where the community service took place is at the regency level, far from the capital city. The Internet has been a significant part of the lives of Indonesians, where more people rely on the Internet to work, study, or get entertainment. In the survey, 58.6% of students used the Internet for less than 5 hours, while 40% admitted to spending 6-10 online. This statistic correlates with the national average data, where Indonesians aged 16 to 64 spend five hours using mobile Internet (23). Nevertheless, although the Internet has brought us opportunities, it also has a dark side that can potentially harm its users, including children.

In the survey, the students were asked whether they had received unpleasant experiences online. Interestingly, the survey results in SMA 1 Bantan are slightly different from the KPAI survey. While almost half of the surveyees from the KPAI survey and the one conducted by authors claimed to never have bad experiences on the Internet, the results for unpleasant experiences from the two surveys varied. The authors' survey

results indicated that obscene ads, gambling ads, money extortion, getting scammed, and being approached by strangers online are the most significant problems. In the KPAI survey (Table 2), the top five are seeing indecent advertisements, gambling ads, receiving obscene images, vulgar videos, and money extortion.

TABLE 2: The KPAI Survey Results.

No.	Unpleasant Experience	Percentage
1.	Claimed to have never had bad experiences on the Internet	48%
2.	Saw indecent advertisements	22%
3.	Saw gambling ads.	18%
4.	Received explicit images	7%
5.	Received vulgar videos	5%
6.	Money extortion	4%
7.	Getting scammed	3%
8.	Asked to meet strangers they met online	3%
9.	Getting bullied	2%
10.	Asked to send improper images	2%
11.	Asked to send obscene videos	1%

It is important to note that GBV cases are mostly underreported because victims are afraid to speak up. Based on the KPAI data in 2021, the committee only received 2982 cases (24). The top three cases reported were physical and psychological violence (1138 cases), sexual crime (859 cases), and pornography and cybercrime (345 cases). There is also the problem with the normalization of some acts of violence. In the case of cyberbullying, for example, research conducted by the Center for Digital Society (CfDS) and Center for Lifespan and Development (CLSD) Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM) in 2021 disclosed that there is a convention to see bullying and cyberbullying as a routine practice, easy to do, and easy to forget (25).

4.2. Gender Mainstreaming in Education

The students' unfamiliarity with gender and types of gender-based violence signals how gender mainstreaming has not been thoroughly institutionalized, even though it is a necessary step to prevent GBV. Gender mainstreaming was introduced through the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995 as a global strategy to combat gender inequality. There are twelve "critical areas of concern" (26, p.18) identified in the document, including women and poverty; education and training of women; women and health; violence

against women; women and armed conflict; women and the economy; women in power and decision-making; institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women; human rights of women; women and the environment; and the girl child. The Beijing Platform of Action was getting a stronger mandate when the United Nations General Assembly formally endorsed it in 2000.

Education is one of the focus areas of gender mainstreaming because of challenges to empower women, such as “persisting gender discrimination and bias, including in teacher training; gender-based occupational stereotyping in schools; persistent use of gender stereotypes in educational materials” (27, p.4) still exist. Thus, gender mainstreaming in education is not only a matter of providing equal access to all, especially girls/women, but also ensuring the structural adjustments support the empowerment of girls/women.

According to UNESCO (28, p.2), gender responsiveness in education is a procedure comprised of:

1. questioning the underlying paradigm on which the national policy, goals and objectives have been based;
2. aligning priorities, activities and critical issues with the principal of gender equality;
3. placing gender-sensitive women and men in strategic positions in policy- and decision-making;
4. making women visible in all data;
5. providing systematic training in gender analysis, methodology and awareness.

One of the remedies to the misconception of gender, as shown by the answers of SMA 1 Bantan students, is through initiating a gender awareness program. Gender awareness, which is “the ability to view society from the perspective of gender roles and how this has affected women’s needs in comparison to the needs of men” (29), is critical to creating equality among girls and boys.

The Indonesian government has supported gender issues through the President’s Instruction Number 9/2000 on Gender-mainstreaming in the National Development. The Ministry of Education followed the President Instruction by releasing Minister of Education Regulation Number 84/2008 on Guidelines for Implementing Gender Mainstreaming in Education. However, Indonesia still suffers from gender disparity. Despite the encouragement, gender mainstreaming in Indonesia has faced enormous challenges, from coordination problems to human resources shortages (30). Even at the tertiary

education gender inequality is apparent, indicated by the disproportionate number of female lecturers compared to males and the small number of female lecturers who got promoted to full professors or sit at the top management at the universities. The socio-cultural factor is not the single cause, as many reasons contribute to the gender gap at universities (31).

4.3. School-Based Intervention to Prevent Online Gender-Based Violence

Based on the survey results, half of the students who participated in the survey revealed that they received online threats and cybercrimes while surfing the Internet, from being exposed to gambling and vulgar advertising, forced to send money, persuaded to meet in person by strangers, scammed, bullied, stalked, to being coerced to send compromised images and videos. All of these negative experiences are not without consequences. Monaghan et al. (32), for example, argue that children and teenagers exposed to gambling ads might start gambling at an early age. Inevitably, someone with a gambling addiction might develop other problems such as drug, alcohol, and anger. Meanwhile, the effects of gender-based violence in bullying, stalking, and sexual harassment are also overwhelming. The expanding bodies of research on gender violence have shown that victims are at risk of not only physical injuries, but also mental health and emotional problems, such as depression, anxiety disorders, and suicidal ideation (33–36). In the long run, these issues would create “a generational burden” (37, p.12) that will affect the victims and people close to them. It is important to note that in some cases, these threats cost the lives of the victims, as can be seen from the cases of teenagers getting killed by the people they met online (38–40).

One of the significant issues in overcoming gender violence is the victims’ unwillingness to report their cases, even though the disclosure is critical to breaking the cycle of violence and anticipating the adverse outcomes of abuse. According to Paine and Hansen (41), children who are abuse victims tend to hold their stories and only disclose them after they experience repeated abuse. Many factors contribute to this position. As confirmed in the McElvaney et al. study (42), victims of sexual abuse are reluctant to speak up because they are afraid, ashamed, and concerned about the consequences they will receive if they speak or remain silent. Parents or caregivers who are alerted of the abuses might also choose not to reach the authorities and prefer to solve the problems informally due to their cultural and religious practices (43). Thus, due to the

underreporting of cases, the official records of GBV in Indonesia may not provide us with the complete picture as the actual case number may be higher.

GBV requires collective efforts from all around the world. At the global level, states have pledged through Sustainable Development Programs to reach gender equality by ending all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls (44). At the national level, Indonesia's commitment to gender equality is demonstrated through establishing legal and formal infrastructure to protect the rights of women and children. This can be seen from the ratification treaties like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the establishment of *Komnas Perempuan* and KPAI, and the adoption of Sexual Violence Crime Law and Child Protection Law. Nevertheless, these legal and formal infrastructures are not enough without profound changes in how people perceive the notion of gender equality and how they recognize the harmful effects of gender violence.

To eradicate gender violence at the school level, the authors recommend that school administrators initiate school-based intervention. Intervention is "the purposive and organized effort to intervene in an ongoing social process for the purpose of solving a problem or providing a service" (45). Siddiqui and Schultze-Krumbholz (46) analyze seventeen interventions to combat cyberbullying worldwide in their study and categorize the interventions into three groups. The first group aims at boosting teachers' professional development, especially in handling antisocial behaviors and teaching social-emotional skills, such as kindness, flexibility, conflict resolution, and coping skills. Studies on teacher-led intervention, however, are split on the effectiveness of this type of intervention. The second intervention program aims at empowering "individuals to cope with bullying" without "relying on teachers, peers, or parents" (46, p.6). This intervention is also deemed ineffective because victims' motivation tends to deplete over time. The last type of intervention is the whole-school approach. This intervention sees cyberbullying as a systemic problem that should not only focus on the bullies and the victims but also the entire school community.

School-based interventions, in this case, are programs the school management provides to correct someone's behavior or improve their knowledge or coping skills within the school environment. The school-based intervention program may utilize "lessons, videos, presentations, discussions, and workshops" (47, p.175) and attended by students, student's organization, teachers, staff, parents, parent-teacher association, and nearby people. Several studies claim that the whole-school approach effectively tackles bullying (48,49). Meanwhile Siddiqui and Schultze-Krumbholz (46) point out the

downside of this approach. Since this intervention seeks to reform the school climate to “promote safe, supportive, responsible, engaged, and thriving school communities” (46, p.8), the school administrators must overcome challenges such as budget, time commitment, and parents’ support to make it work.

With the whole-school approach, the intervention to specifically address online GBV has to have materials related to gender awareness and the teaching of cyber-safety content. According to Cross et al. (48, p.4), education on internet security includes:

1. the safe use of ICT, including internet privacy and protection;
2. the negative influences of online behavior;
3. online moral and legal issues;
4. how to report unsafe cyber behaviors;
5. online preventative action; and
6. positive cyber-bystander education.

In addition, school administrators need to develop proactive policies and strategies to address online gender violence. Since online threats and cybercrime mainly occur outside school hours, school management must create a clear guideline pointing out all parties’ responsibilities (school, parents, and law enforcement). Schools must also build a supportive and protective environment, from ensuring parents are well-informed with policies and information regarding online GBV to creating a safe space for students, teachers, and staff to file reports on gender violence.

5. Conclusion

Undeniably, the Internet has become a significant part of people’s lives. More and more people rely on the Internet for studying, working, or getting entertained, including children under 18 years old. However, despite the Internet offering a space for people to harness their creativity, it has a dark side where some people intentionally harm others. This paper has discussed the problem with online gender violence, where types of violence that usually occur in the real world have been transformed in cyberspace. Using the baseline data from a community service program at SMA 1 Bantan, Bengkalis, the authors pointed out how students at the regency level are not immune from receiving online threats and cyberviolence. The discussion ends with a recommendation to schools, the primary agency in providing education services to the students, to take a proactive stand to anticipate online GBV.

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Declaration of Conflict Interest

The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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