

# The Process of Deciding Mother's Role for Preparing Children as Part of an Online Sexual Crime-Free Digital Society: A Grounded Theory

## Abstract

**Background:** In this technological era, there is a serious global threat to child development, the phenomenon of child sexual abuse via the internet (Internet Child Sexual Abuse/ICSA), and mothers must adapt to the era's needs. The purpose of this study is to explore the decision-making process regarding the role of mothers in protecting their children from sexual harassment in the digital age. **Materials and Methods:** A grounded theory approach was used in Bengkulu, Indonesia, in 2021. Data were obtained through focus group discussions on 12 mothers, 4 girls, and 4 female activists (who were selected by theoretical sampling), which were analyzed using thematic analysis. Memos were generated after categorical analysis was sorted after saturation occurred. **Results:** Five theoretical categories formed the core category. The five categories of the theory were "mother's views on sexual education in children," "strategies for sexual communication with children," "the negative impact of online media," "limits in carrying out supervision," and "preparation needed by children." The memo was drawn theoretically, "new challenges in parenting," which was then made into a core category. The core category was "preparing children to be part of a sex crime-free digital society." **Conclusions:** Parents teach their kids self-control, awareness, and the importance of using virtual media wisely and selectively. The parenting and technology recommendations assist mothers in protecting their children from internet-based sexual crimes. Maternity nurses should promote reproductive health through the creation of relevant media.

**Keywords:** Child, female, Indonesia, internet, parenting

## Introduction

The digitalization of life in industry 5.0. era influences almost all dimensions of human life, characterized by digitization and massive internet utilization. Both adults and children can efficiently operate the internet as a medium of entertainment, communication, and learning. However, the risks there may affect the child's development, mainly child sexual abuse through Internet technology-assisted child sexual abuse (TA-CSA), particularly Internet child sexual abuse (ICSA). ICSA is a violation of children's rights to freedom from harassment and exploitation, a point of an international agreement on the convention on the rights of the child (CRC), universally ratified 32 years ago (November 1989). Nevertheless, the modern digitalized era allowed exploitation perpetrators to commit their actions, a serious global issue.<sup>[1,2]</sup> The psychological effects experienced by child victims of

sexual violence can last throughout their lives and will make the victim grow up as an unproductive individual.<sup>[3]</sup> Especially digital traces that are difficult to erase make long-suffering for the victim.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made the Internet a primary need as an effect of social-physical restrictions. This condition exposes children to online-based gender violence. Based on data from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (in Indonesian: *Komisi Perlindungan Anak Indonesia*, abbreviated as *KPAI*), in 2020, about 635.6 online-based gender violence were recorded from 2016 to 2020. Thus, special attention is needed to overcome this problem. The issue of violence is an area of discussion in maternity nursing. This shows that nurses are responsible for sexual and reproductive health (SRH).<sup>[4]</sup> However, previous research has not focused much on online gender-based violence. The concept

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of education starting from early childhood has been widely echoed and is still being evaluated due to a significant increase in cases from year to year.

Family and environment are informal education for a child, as stated in an arrangement of article one, point 13 of the Republic of Indonesia Law No. 20 of 2003.<sup>[5]</sup> Parents, as the first informal teachers with the role of honing, caring, and nurturing, must meet their children's needs. Technological developments also trigger problems in the parenting role. Children surf virtually without any barriers of distance and time, even unlimited. Parental supervision is required without neglecting the child's need for technology. Parenting patterns must adapt to the needs of the times. According to Hurlock in 1999 which was rewritten by adawiah in 2017, wrote that parenting patterns are influenced by various factors, namely the parents' personality, the parents' age, beliefs, parenting received from parents in the past, parental education, gender, socioeconomic status, and others.<sup>[6,7]</sup> All these things affect parents in determining the parenting style they choose for their children in this digital era.

To learn how the process of decision parenting will be used in this digitalization era, the right type of research is grounded theory. This is considering the multidimensional and complex factors that influence parenting patterns for children. The grounded theory offers a strategy to develop theoretical analysis to generate new concepts whose applications can be used in professional practice by studying social phenomena from the perspective of symbolic interaction.<sup>[8,9]</sup> This study aimed to explain a theoretical explanation of the role of mothers and the needs of parents in child care to protect against virtual-based sexual abuse.

## Materials and Methods

This research used a qualitative grounded theory method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).<sup>[10]</sup> This research was conducted from July to December 2021 in Bengkulu City. In this study, the mothers' perceptions and attitudes toward early sexual education and their needs regarding online-based sexual violence prevention will be explored through social processes in a group of mothers with school-age children. Participants in this study were selected by theoretical sampling. Data were obtained through focus group discussions on 12 mothers with children of primary school age around 10 to 15 years, 4 teenage girls, and 4 female activists. participants were recruited on that basis willingness and ability to express.

Focus group discussions (FGDs) for mothers' groups were conducted twice to identify mothers' perceptions and needs of mobile-based applications as educational media to prevent sexual violence against children in July and August 2021. In October, we conducted an FGD with four young girls; in December, we conducted an FGD with four

women activists. The implementation of each FGD ranged from 45 min to 60 min at the Campus of Associate degree–Diploma 3 in Nursing, Bengkulu University, and the house of one of the participants. The trend that was the focus of this discussion was the efforts of parents to protect their children from the risk of sexual abuse. The question to mother asked was “What is the mother's opinion or view on sexual education for children?”<sup>[11]</sup> “How did mothers protect their children from sexual crimes in this digital era?” “What is needed in providing sexual education to children?” For the group of young girls, “what are your expectations of parents in preventing sexual abuse?” The women's activist group was asked, “How is the role of parents in overcoming sexual abuse against children?” FGD transcribed and recorded after FGD on women activists obtained data saturation. The data collection process continued with document studies, mainly building memos to generate the theory.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The data and information obtained through the FGD were grouped into several categories (open coding). Furthermore, the existing categories were selected into a theoretical model (axial coding), linked to other categories (selective coding) as a story framework.<sup>[12]</sup> The elaboration of keywords was used as information to define categories. Comparative analysis of theoretical categories was carried out constantly. Until there was a redundancy of information indicating data saturation, a memo was formulated that directed it to the core category. Data validity was measured through data credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. There were two sessions with four triggering questions in FGD. Thus, the researchers had more opportunities to build a trusting relationship with the participants. Participants' trust in the researcher is needed for producing possibly natural-accurate data. All activities in the research were contained in the audit track in the form of detailed notes ranging from decisions to determine participant criteria, setting FGDs, formulating trigger questions according to research focus, and reflective and analytical ownership notes. The audit tracks contributed to the dependability of research results. A WhatsApp group was selected as a social media connection between researchers and participants, making the member check process easier. In addition, after each FGD process, the participants were asked to respond to the description and interpretation of data results. Based on the discussion material and theoretical knowledge, a solid description was created. Furthermore, the triangulation process was carried out by data triangulation, researcher triangulation, and theoretical triangulation.

## Ethical considerations

The research was under the ethical principles that apply according to the 7 World Health Organization (WHO) standards. Participants were explained and then filled out an informed consent form and asked about their willingness voluntarily. This study guarantees confidentiality

participants and ensure that the research is not physically detrimental and psychologically. Ethical approval was obtained through the Health Research Ethics Committee of the University of Jember, Faculty of Nursing, no. 145/UN25.1.14/KEPK/2021.

## Results

### Characteristics of participants

A total of 12 mothers with school children aged 10 to 15 years were involved as participants. They were mothers of children from different elementary schools in Bengkulu City. Also, four girls aged 14 to 15 years, and four female activists were included. According to religion and belief, one person was Christian, namely a women's activist, and other participants were Muslims [Table 1].

The results of the constant comparative analysis of theoretical categories resulted in the core category, mainly "preparing children as part of a free-sexual crime digital society." Five theoretical categories and 15 subcategories formed the core category. The five theoretical categories were "mother's views on sexual education to children," "strategies for sexual communication with children," "negative impacts of online media," "limitations in carrying out supervision," and "preparation needed by children." From the five categories, a memo was drawn theoretically, "new challenges in parenting," which was then made into a core category.

### Theoretical category 1: Mother's view of child sexual education

All participants expressed their views on the importance of providing sexual education to children. Two subcategories were found, including changing old views on sexual education and online media as an information source.

#### *Changing the old view of sexual education*

Mothers realized that there must be a change in views on sexual education in this technological development era. In the past, parents were reluctant to talk about sexuality to their children; it was considered a taboo and violated the value of decency. This view needs to be changed yet. "... *So it is better for us as common parents to change our mindset, we should no longer feel that sex education is taboo for children*" (Participant 5).

#### *Online media as an information source*

Online media is one of the sources of information for children, including about sexuality; even children often get it first from the media than from their parents. Children were more interested in digging the information through electronic media. "... *So, I think children watch gadgets more than television, then I think sexual education is crucial for children*" (Participant 9).

**Table 1: Characteristics of participants**

Participant codes	Age (years old)	Last education	Occupation	Number of Children
<b>Mother group</b>				
P1	37	Senior high school	Private employee	3
P2	48	Bachelor degree	Civil servant	3
P3	31	Bachelor degree	Housewife	3
P4	45	Bachelor degree	Teacher	2
P5	34	Bachelor degree	Teacher	2
P6	44	Bachelor degree	Teacher	3
P7	36	Vocational high school	Housewife	2
P8	31	Senior high school	Housewife	2
P9	38	Vocational high school	Businessman	1
P10	35	Senior high school	Housewife	1
P11	27	Senior high school	Housewife	2
P12	40	Associate degree – Diploma 1	Entrepreneur	3
<b>Girl group</b>				
P13	15	Senior high school		
P14	16	Senior high school		
P15	15	Senior high school		
P16	15	Senior high school		
<b>Women's activist group</b>				
P17	28	Bachelor degree	Female activists	
P18	48	Magister	Female activists	
P19	30	Magister	Female activists	
P20	27	Bachelor degree	Female activists	

## Theoretical category 2: Sexual communication strategies with children

Mothers' awareness about the importance of early sexual education had not been matched by adequate knowledge. This knowledge was related to communication and appropriate material boundaries given according to the child's growth stage. There were two subcategories: communication of sexuality according to growth and development and maintaining the ethical and cultural aspects.

### *Sexual communication according to growth*

Mothers found difficulties in communicating sexuality to provide education to their children. *"In my opinion, learning about sexuality is important, but it is difficult for us to do it in reality. Really, since the thing related to sexuality is vulnerable... In fact, maybe there is information that children really need to know"* (Participant 4).

### *Maintaining the value of ethical and cultural aspects*

Mothers wished they could provide sex education regarding the values of propriety that exist in society. *"...Education and knowledge about sexuality itself, if we have conveyed the basis of religious knowledge or their ethical attitudes and behavior in the house, the child will understand well"* (Participant 6).

## Theoretical category 3: Negative impacts of online media

There are three subcategories for this third category: Electronic media also shows negative things, the equal risk between boys and girls, and parents must follow technological developments.

### *Online media also shows negative things*

Mothers felt the need to protect their children with early sexual education to counteract the adverse effects of the internet, including sexual crimes against children. *"...Do not let children watch negative things. Usually, the games show violence, such as shootings or pornographic in the form of cartoons. So, I ask to delete the game; it harms our children"* (Participant 5).

### *The equal risk between boys and girls*

Mothers are aware of the risks of the internet, regardless of gender, and caution is required when raising boys and girls. *"... Nowadays it is not only women who are insecure of child abuse, but sexual harassment is everywhere. Nowadays, there are many perpetrators, LGBT men against boys. So, our homework is double, especially for girls and boys, the danger is always threatening"* (Participant 5).

### *Grooming as an online crime mode*

Parents were aware of the existence of online sexual crimes. Parents warned their children of these dangers. *"...so I remind the children about the application, like Instagram or any else of kind of community social media with their friends, not to make friends with unknown people, since all of these cell phones can be accessed manipulation later. I*

*am afraid this introduction used a fake profile photo. They may claim as teenagers even though it is not. It turns out that the modus operandi is to have malicious intent on children"* (Participant 5).

*"Even high school kids when we explain that, well they do not know they are victims of violence, when they do "pap-pap" they have become part of the violence that other people can use to threaten blackmail and all kinds of things."* (Participant 18).

### *Parents need to be skilled in technology*

Parents should increase their knowledge and mastery of technology so that the supervisory function can be carried out. *"... Upgrading the ability of mothers to use gadgets and operating applications on gadgets or tablets or computers at home"* (Participant 3).

## Theoretical category 4: Limitations for supervising

The theoretical category of parents' limitations for supervision was divided into two subcategories: Being busy as working mothers or taking care of younger children and efforts to protect children from child sexual abuse (CSA).

### *Busy as a working mother or taking care of younger children*

It was known that parents also had limitations in supervising children interacting with online-based media. This condition was triggered because the mother was a worker and had other small children; thus, the attention to children was divided. *"...We are as parents, also need to go to work, busy ourselves, and finally, the communication needed by their children forgot"* (Participant 2).

### *Mother efforts to protect children from Child Sexual Abuse (CSA)*

Mothers have taken steps to protect their children from the harm of online-based sexual crimes. This can be seen from the following statement: *"...Restricting a child from playing with gadgets, maybe we give freedom about 3 h in 1 day under our supervision to know what applications do they open so that the child can avoid sexual threats like that"* (Participant 10).

## Theoretical category 5: Preparation needed by children

The fifth subcategory was in the form of supplies needed by children to protect themselves from online sexual crimes. The subcategories were a provision of religious knowledge and harmonious family relations.

### *Provision of religious knowledge*

Mother believed that good religious knowledge creates a sense of introspection in children to prevent danger. *"Yes, in my opinion, for me, the most needed is religious knowledge because I see many children around me and I read those cases"* (Participant 5).



**Harmonious family relationship**

The family is the first school in the formation of a child’s character. Mothers were aware of this and thought family harmony is needed to protect children from the dangers of children sexual abuse. *“In my opinion, what is needed is educating children about sex as a priority. Of course, also religion and harmonious relations” (Participant 11).*

**Memo: new challenges in parenting**

A memo was drawn from the five theoretical categories above. Besides, law enforcement was needed for the issue of sexual crimes against children. Especially in Indonesia, legal reform is needed for the sustainable protection of children with sexual crimes against children. Currently, the ICSA phenomenon has become a new focus. Furthermore, the core category was formulated: Efforts to protect children as part of an online-based sexual crimes-free digital society [Figure 1].

**Discussion**

The results obtained from this study were in the form of an explanation of the role and needs of mothers regarding childcare in the digital era in dealing with the risk of online sexual violence. A memo is generated about a new challenge in parenting. Parents are faced with the demands of meeting the educational and information needs of their children regarding digital technology; however, they must protect their children from the dangers of online sexual violence. Mothers are the first teachers to their children teaching everything, especially SRH.

Parents’ perceptions of early sexual education in children will affect children’s knowledge and behavior about sexuality. Previous research stated that many parents were aware of the importance of early education for their children but were constrained by the lack of knowledge in communicating sexuality. In addition, parents still say that sex education is inappropriate for children because it is considered vulgar and taboo. Recommendations from previous studies refer to the importance of the role of mothers as educators for children. A mother’s perception can be used to develop educational programs. Parents need to understand the stages of their child’s psychosexual development. The provision of sex education through parenting allows children to get the right information about sex, this is expected to minimize children’s exposure to other media that are not appropriate for getting information about sex.<sup>[11,13-15]</sup>

Shams et al. wrote that many mothers have limitations in providing sexual health education for their adolescent daughters. These obstacles include their insufficient knowledge about sexual issues, embarrassment surrounding discussions of this issue with their daughters’ sexual issues, fear of the arrogance and curiosity of girls, and lack of skills in effective communication about sexuality. For that mothers need to get exercise so that they are ready to educate their daughters. In younger children, mothers should be able to teach about the underwear program rules. It is hoped that children’s understanding of the program is constantly refreshed so that children in their development can always protect themselves from the risk of sexual abuse.<sup>[14,16]</sup>

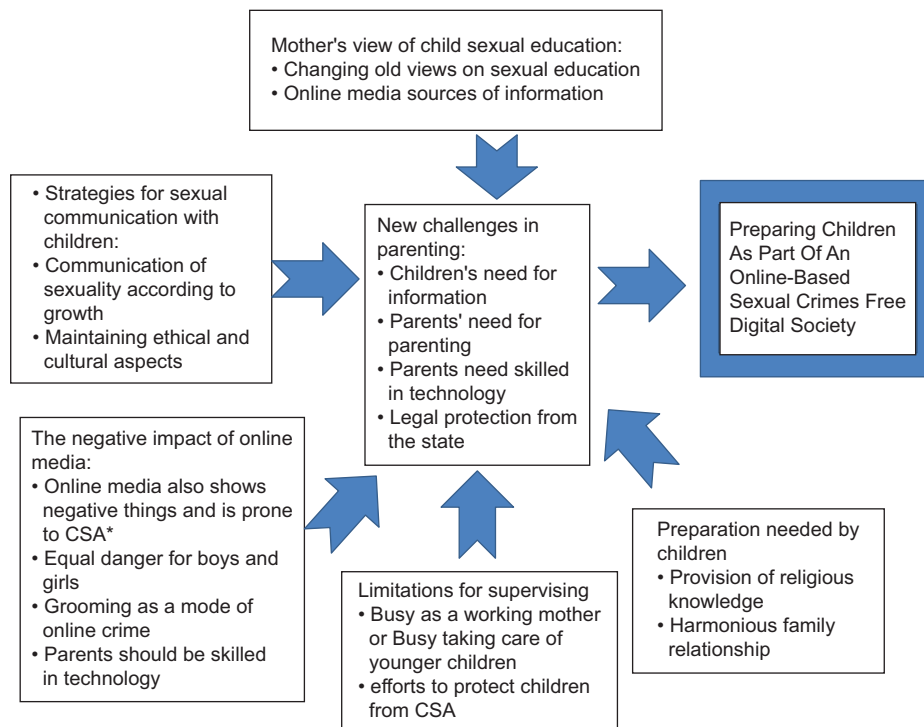


Figure 1: Grounded theory model framework “preparing children as part of online-based sexual crimes free digital society”. \*CSA: Child sexual abuse

Sexual education aims to build self-control and self-awareness of both girls and boys against the dangers of ICSA. They must guard against curiosity and seek safe sources to avoid being provoked by opposing tendencies. Previous studies have shown that the higher the self-control in children, the lower the level of addiction to gadgets and other negative effects of the internet.<sup>[17-21]</sup> The strategy is to increase awareness among children, parents, and the wider community. This awareness will trigger an attitude to help protect each other. Moreover, children are protected from CSA by surfing the internet.<sup>[22]</sup> Parents, especially mothers, have to change their views on sexual education as a taboo subject given to children from childhood. This is not contradictory both culturally and religiously, it can even prevent social chaos.<sup>[23-25]</sup>

In addition, there is a need for cooperation between parents, schools, and teachers in terms of reproductive and sexual health education to form consistency so that children avoid understanding bias. Social control from parents and educators can reduce the risk of this sexting behavior.<sup>[26,27]</sup> Teachers should be trained to speak about sensitive topics and explore and hear secrecy about abuse, dating violence, and incest. Teachers will face diverse students' backgrounds that influence their beliefs and values about sexuality. Students' beliefs and values may differ from the beliefs held by teachers.

Parents are also required to have the ability to protect their children from the dangers of online sexual crimes amid their limitations on technology. A study shows the involvement of parents in SRH education programs through Online and Mobile Technologies (OMTs) conducted in the UK. Parents get information on communicating sexuality to their teens, susceptible topics.<sup>[28]</sup> Parental participation and relationships with children in cyberspace need to be built to counteract the destructive effects of the internet. Another effort is networking between parents to share experiences and discuss with other parents connected to social media. This peer-to-peer method can be used to counter the same methods used by CSA perpetrators in carrying out their actions through online media. Digital technology is expected to be used as a reporting medium and increase community participation to protect victims.<sup>[29]</sup>

The mother's technological ability is advantageous in carrying out the supervisory function both in real life and on the Internet. Mothers who have an account on social media can be friends, communicate with children, and follow their sons' activities in the virtual world. Mothers need to understand the features to protect their children, such as age restrictions, being able to browse their child's browsing history and even timing their internet usage. Besides that, mothers are often considered individuals who lack literacy and are vulnerable to commodification due to the use of social media.<sup>[30]</sup> This condition can put mothers at risk of online gender-based violence. Even though the

influence of mothers as role models is enormous on the development of their children. A mother's ability with technology can protect herself and her family.

The use of the Internet as a tool for sexual satisfaction leads to online sexual activity. The Internet is a medium that is quite attractive to CSA actors because of its ease of access, anonymity, low cost, no time limit, and universal nature. The use of the dark web can protect perpetrators from detection through anonymity and privacy. Individuals with the same behavior and needs will feel comfortable with the existence of online media that can be used as a forum for them to share and strengthen each other in one community. Of course, this is a contradiction for people outside the community who will stigmatize the group. Pedophiles, exploiters, and CSA perpetrators are becoming more active on the dark web. Social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic is a supporting factor for perpetrators to carry out their actions on the dark web. This condition is because many people are forced to interact online.<sup>[31,32]</sup>

The perpetrator started his action with grooming, a mode trend carried out by CSA perpetrators online or face-to-face. They build a close emotional connection with the target until they are deceived. Children do not realize they are being manipulated until they engage in sexting, making pornographic images, videos, and webcam interactions. All traumatic impacts experienced by child victims of ICSA are equivalent to those of direct contact with sexual violence victims.<sup>[33-35]</sup> Considering the impact of CSA on children's mental health, which can disrupt the mental health of families and communities, the participation of mental health professionals is required.<sup>[36]</sup> The rise of ICSA cases, including non-consensual pornography, has not been accompanied by adequate legal remedies. This condition is not only in Indonesia; globally, ICSA is still a legal discussion, including in the United States. Often victims are blamed back.<sup>[37]</sup> This is because ICSA is still considered a minor violation unless an offline meeting causes physical contact.

ICSA is still being discussed in many studies to be used by policymakers to make decisions. Research involves professionals from various disciplines such as teachers and legal experts. Thus, it is hoped that clear protocols can be formulated in response to reported cases.<sup>[38]</sup> Global Aliace (2020) reports that more than 70% of sexual harassment images involve victims of children under the age of 10 years. However, the CRC has not specifically paid attention to online sexual crimes due to the development of the industry at that time. However, the CRC still guides the principle of protecting and respecting children's rights. The convention establishes general international standards on which any law, action, or procedure related to sexual violence, exploitation, and abuse of children is based. The state should implement these rights. The agreement of the European Union countries resulted in a comprehensive

package of actions to address sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children both online and offline. It is hoped that these results can be applied globally to create harmonization in global criminal law. The contribution can be in the form of international operational cooperation, for example, strengthening Interpol. This is done to eradicate online sexual exploitation and child abuse.<sup>[39]</sup>

One of the main limitations that must be considered in this study is that the topic of sexual violence is a multidimensional topic; so, an approach with other related disciplines is needed to organize the researcher's understanding. The mentality and experience of the researcher can also influence the findings of this study, which is considered a limitation of all qualitative research.

## Conclusion

The era influences children's education. This digital era, with all its benefits and risks, presents parenting challenges for parents. Parents must be skilled in technology to create a digital generation free from sexual violence against children. Health practitioners, especially maternity nurses, can take on the role of assisting parents in educating their children. The use of technology for education is necessary, considering children's needs for interactive information and technological skills.

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## Conflicts of interest

Nothing to declare.

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