

Online sexual exploitation as Globalization Homemade Problems

Mulia Siregar¹, Weldemina Yudit Tiwery², Agusthina Siahaya³, Aan Wasan⁴, H Widyaningsih⁵

¹Universitas Medan Area, Medan, Indonesia. Email: muliasiregar@staff.uma.ac.id

²Institut Agama Kristen Negeri (IAKN) Ambon, Indonesia. Email: yudit.tiwery@iaknambon.ac.id

³Institut Agama Kristen Negeri (IAKN) Ambon, Indonesia. Email: a_siahaya@iaknambon.ac.id

⁴Universitas Negeri Jakarta, Jakarta, Indonesia. Email: aanwasan@unj.ac.id

⁵Universitas Negeri Jakarta, Jakarta, Indonesia. Email: heniwidyaningsih@unj.ac.id

Abstract

Online sexual exploitation is a global epidemic that is increasing at an alarming rate. At any one time, 750,000 individuals across the world are looking to connect with children and young people online for sexual exploitation. Advances in information and communications technologies and increasingly sophisticated digital tools that provide anonymity mean the number of potential victims is growing exponentially, and so too is the pool of those seeking to abuse them. In 2019, record-breaking 70 million total images and videos were reported to NICMEC, an enormous increase on the 1.1 million it received in 2014. One in three Internet users are under 18 years, and more children own or have access to Internet-enabled smart devices. Social media has created new opportunities for would-be offenders to interact with children anonymously and unsupervised. Sexualized images of girls and young women are ubiquitous in advertising, merchandising, and the entertainment industry. New data gathered by United Kingdom-based internet watchdog the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) revealed that 30 percent of sexually explicit images of children found online are self-generated. The IWF took action over 124,605 images found online between January and November 2019. Over three-quarters of these images (78 percent) featured children aged 11 to 13, mostly girls.

Keywords: sexual exploitation, globalization, homemade problem, online, Internet

1. Introduction

An investigation by *The New York Times* on how technology companies and the United States government are being overwhelmed by this epidemic found that a record 45 million online photos and videos of child sexual exploitation were reported by US-based technology companies to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) in 2018.

Adolescent girls are particularly at risk of being groomed, coerced, or blackmailed into providing explicit images and videos, often via webcams, which can then be posted online and shared via networks across the world.

Children sometimes send videos and images to peers on smartphones and via social media platforms. Victims can be left feeling sexually violated, powerless, socially isolated, and stigmatized. Mental health problems include depression, and suicidal thoughts.

As victims reach the age of majority, they no longer have the legal protections afforded to minors in different legal and policy contexts.

The sense of revictimization arises from images of abuse being shared repeatedly across the digital landscape and viewed multiple times by countless people. Frequently, requests asking for content to be removed are ignored, or image taken off one online platform, soon reappear elsewhere. This can feel like ongoing sexual assault. Governments, technology companies, research institutions and many others are providing examples of successful interventions and innovations.

In 2009, Microsoft partnered with Dartmouth College to develop Photo DNA, a technology that aids in locating and removing online child abuse content. Today, PhotoDNA is used to detect and report millions of illegal images. It works by creating a unique digital signature of an image called a “hash”. Similar to a fingerprint.

Organizations such as Net Clean and Thorn are creating tools to assist law enforcement, tech platforms, and civil society organizations in identifying illegal material online, track exploiters, and bring them to

justice. The Global Threat Assessment by WePROTECT Global Alliance to end Child Sexual Exploitation Online has brought together Governments, the tech industry, and NGOs to galvanize global action, increase understanding about the problem, and develop and implement strategies.

Technological solutions need to work alongside legal and policy solutions. But legislation and law enforcement have failed to keep up with cybercrime. The global, complex nature of online sexual exploitation requires that all of us come together to find solutions. This involves applying a gendered lens to research and understanding how the internet and technology are being misused to facilitate sexual exploitation. We need formulate and adopt international regulations or a global convention to lay out the responsibility and accountability of all actors in the online sexual exploitation of vulnerable people.

2. When sacred love ends

As a child of devoted parents, as a millennial whose peers are saying their “I dos” and as a fan of grow-old-with-you love stories, I can’t help thinking about marriage. I’m among the millions of Filipinos who hold marriage in extremely high regard. It’s a lifelong commitment. For some, it’s because marriage is made sacred by the divine; for others, it’s because the Constitution itself describes it as “an inviolable social institution”. Either way points to the sanctity of this union and the power of the love that founds it. So when confronted with a marriage that turns vicious, we have a hard time grasping that it is broken. If love conquers all and if the union is sacred, how could it possibly fail?

The romantics in us point at divorce as the culprit in failed marriages. It’s the easiest scapegoat because it’s tangible – documents, signatures and all. And the fact that the Philippines is somehow aligned with the Vatican in not having legalized it (yet?) seems to add to the feeling that we’re on the righteous path.

But divorce is not what destroys marriages. It’s abuse, infidelity, chronic toxicity. The sacredness of the union is defiled once a spouse is subjected to physical, financial or psychological suffering. What is supposed to be inviolable is violated the moment one’s rights are stepped on – and again, and again. It is because of these that a marriage ends.

Divorce is only a legal means to clean up the fray and free individuals from torment. It is not merely a selfish grab for liberation; it is a way for abused persons to distance themselves from their abuser and finally get a chance to be self-reliant. Neither should divorce mean trauma for children. When conducted with respect, sensitivity, and genuine care for the children, the legal process could establish sound arrangements for their welfare (such as child custody, child support and coparenting).

Currently, Filipino spouses who experience these have little to no chance of a remedy, as legal separation and annulment are both restrictive in their scope and costs. Divorce may be the one realistic option for many of those who need an opening to freedom. It is cruel and unjust to deny them this necessity.

We have heard it asked, “What’s the relevance of marriage if you could just divorce sooner or later?”

There are strict provisions and valid grounds required to dissolve a marriage. It’s not free pass for anyone who simply grows tired of marital life. “Everlasting love” and “for better or for worse” are so easy to utter while basking in the glow of romantic proposals and beautiful wedding ceremonies. It’s easy to believe that a union blessed by the heavens could never be harmful to a wife or husband. We’re faithful romantics, and we’re sometimes blind to the needs of those who suffer outside our rose-tinted vision. But love can turn malignant, and even a sanctified bond can end in shambles. Nobody should have to stay trapped in that ordeal. It’s time we allowed for a clean closure.

3. Globalization problems are homemade

The move toward globalization made some believe that history is linear. This is certainly not the case. The continuing backlash against globalization, as well as the resulting retrenchment, which frequently takes the form of nationalism, demonstrates two facts: first, globalization is subject to setbacks, and second, the multilateral trade regime is both fragile and perhaps somewhat flawed.

The backlash against globalization has globalists looking for pathways forward. This is all the more necessary as the dangers the world faces, both economic and political, are serious and growing.

Mounting nationalistic tendencies in the United States, Russia, China, Brazil, Hungary, India, the Philippines and many other countries are continuing to fragment the international consensus. This spread

of nationalism is disrupting the established political and economic order. Fragmentation of this consensus now threatens to destabilize the world and jeopardize the rapid economic growth and relative stability experienced since the world war II. Bulwarks of stability, such as the World Trade Organization, are under attack. So are other multilateral institutions.

At the core, though, the backlash against globalization is misdirected. In most cases, the primary reason for the electorate's frustration is the inequality of economic opportunity within countries.

Some wrongly blame this inequality on international and regional trade agreements. Some blame immigration. Others more correctly place the blame on lack of education, poor infrastructure, poor government and a lack of access to capital.

Regardless of the cause identified above, most people would agree that inequality of opportunity has marginalized large segments of the population in many countries. In Europe, the US and even across Africa, inequality of opportunity has fueled immigration, has fueled resentment and nationalism. One important point that should be clear is that: the recourse to nationalism that is so temptingly offered by the populists does little to address the problem of-largely-domestic inequality. Even so, one question that warrants reflection is this: where did the West go wrong in its journey towards a more globalized world and the resulting nationalism? Our political and economic leaders share much of the responsibility. They have not taken adequate steps to address the rising inequality of opportunity.

They have also failed to establish an environment that would nurture satisfactory employment opportunities and improve governance. Long-term thinking has been overtaken by short-term political opportunism. It is easier politically for politicians to blame "globalization"-instead of acknowledging the severe policy errors they have made at home. Unfortunately, there are no short-term solutions. Many of the problems Western societies are experiencing are due to failures in their educational systems. This cannot be due to a lack of money or wealth. Instead, it is due to a lack of proper attention to other issues, such as how we educate those born in disadvantaged circumstances. Another shortfall is the failure to properly educate prospective business leaders. Complicating the debate is the realization that any realistic solution to educational issues, if properly defined and arrived at, take at least one generation to implement.

Since most politicians are fixated on the short-term election cycle, they are unwilling to invest the necessary political capital to address mid-to long-term education issues. In addition to the standard courses in literacy, math and science, there is an urgent need for high school students from all walks of life to understand two core issues. The first is basic economics, and the second is civics-the rights, obligations and the theoretical and practical aspects of being a citizen in a democracy. High school students should graduate with knowledge of supply and demand, return on investment, gains from trade, comparative advantage, externalities and the tragedy of the commons.

They should also have a basic understanding of the cornerstone principles underlying the international trading system (nondiscrimination, transparency, etc.), as well as the rights, obligations and the philosophy underlying democratic regimes. For business school students, the bar should be set even higher. In addition to more advanced economic knowledge, including principles related to taxation, business school graduates should have an advanced knowledge of political economy, development economics, environmental economics, ethics and global governance issues. This includes the business and societal risks posed by inequality, political uncertainty, corruption, racism, gender issues and the failure of rule-based systems protecting democracy, property rights, investment and trade. Unfortunately, these subjects are seldom taught in business schools, or for that matter in other university curricula.

4. Conclusion

The fight against globalization and the resistance to globalism is a contemporary form of anti-intellectualism. Both global prosperity and global progress depend upon a common understanding of how an interdependent world functions-economically, politically and socially. To get there, we must ensure that students understand basic economics and basic governance issue. We must move beyond the idea that school, in particular business school, is merely a vehicle for amassing personal or shareholder wealth. There is nothing wrong with making money and shareholders also deserve a fair return on their

investment. But making money is much more enjoyable when everyone around us is also enjoying stability and prosperity.

The greater evil is forcing a family to stay together despite the deep and persistent wounds they have to endure, despite the threat to their safety, despite the perils to their well-being. It's tough pill to swallow for us idealists. In a perfect world, divorce would not be a necessity. All the problems and wrongs in a marital relationship would be justly resolvable. But here we are in a world where manipulators chain their partners in both visible and unnoticeable ways, where forced marriages and marital rape exist, where the destructive behavior of one can drag an entire family to rock bottom.

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