

# Media Influence on Revictimization of Sexual Crime Victims: A Qualitative Study of Revenge Porn Cases in Indonesia

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**Abstract** - This research discusses the phenomenon of revictimization of women in the context of technology-based sexual violence, specifically revenge porn and blackmail. Women victims are forced to remain in a sexual relationship with the perpetrator-who is generally a partner or ex-partner-with the threat of spreading intimate footage to social media. This phenomenon causes serious psychological impacts, including depression, rejection from the social environment, failure to report to law enforcement, and victim blaming. This research aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the forms of revictimization experienced by women and the protection solutions that can be provided through the legal system and social approaches. The research method used is descriptive qualitative with data collection techniques through in-depth interviews with three informants who are victims of revenge porn. The results showed that the media played a significant role in exacerbating victims' suffering through the dissemination of sexually exploitative material. This research also provides recommendations for human rights-based protection policies and strategies as well as the urgency of public education in combating digital sexual violence.

**Keywords:** Sexual violence, revenge porn, blackmail, revictimization, digital media

## I. INTRODUCTION

Violence against women has become a complex and multidimensional global issue, covering social, cultural, legal and psychological aspects. In the long history of human civilization, women have often been the object of subordination and violence legalized by patriarchal power structures. In many societies, unequal power relations between men and women cause women to experience ongoing vulnerability in various aspects of life, both in private and public spaces. Such violence is not only limited to physical forms, but also includes verbal, psychological, economic, and sexual violence, which has now penetrated the digital realm.

A 2013 World Health Organization (WHO) report shows that one in three women worldwide has experienced physical or sexual violence in her lifetime. In Indonesia, Komnas Perempuan data through the 2020 Annual Record (CATAHU) recorded more than 1,800 reported cases of dating violence, with most of the perpetrators being the victim's partner or ex-partner. Ironically, much of this violence occurred in private spaces, places that should be safe spaces for women. This shows that violence against women is not just an individual incident, but a reflection of a social system that does not yet favor gender equality.

One of the emerging forms of sexual violence is revenge porn, which is the dissemination of intimate content of a victim without consent, usually by a partner or ex-partner as a form of revenge or blackmail. This phenomenon has increased significantly along with the penetration of information technology and the massive use of social media. Perpetrators often use recordings of intimate relationships to threaten victims to continue serving their sexual desires. These threats have a profound psychological impact on victims, ranging from depression, anxiety, social isolation, to thoughts of ending their lives.

This situation is exacerbated by revictimization by society and the legal system. Victims are often positioned as the guilty party because they are considered "willing to be recorded" or "not taking care of themselves". This condition exacerbates the trauma of victims and makes it difficult for them to get justice. Revictimization is also reflected in lengthy legal procedures that tend to be gender biased, such as the use of mediation in cases of sexual violence or the rejection of reports by police officers. This shows that the state is not fully present in protecting victims.

In the perspective of modern victimology, revictimization is a form of layered injustice experienced by victims due to the failure of the system to provide protection and recovery. The cycle of violence theory proposed by Walker (1984) shows that victims of violence in intimate relationships often experience repeated violence in a rotating pattern. When victims do not get the right intervention from the social environment and the legal system, they will continue to be trapped in the cycle of violence.

The strong patriarchal culture in society exacerbates this condition. In the context of revenge porn, perpetrators feel they have authority over women's bodies, even after the relationship ends. Women are considered objects of ownership, and when they resist, the perpetrator uses intimate content as a means of control. On the other hand, society often responds to revenge porn cases with moral prejudice, rather than as a serious gender-based crime. This suggests an urgent need to build collective awareness about the right to bodily integrity and digital privacy.

Although there are a number of regulations such as the Electronic Information and Transaction Law (UU ITE) and articles in the Criminal Code on threatening, the protection of revenge porn victims is still inadequate. Some articles of the law focus more on aspects of decency rather than victim protection. Proposed regulations such as the Draft Law on the Elimination of Sexual Violence (RUU PKS) and the principle of "Right to be Forgotten" in the digital realm are important to be realized as an effort to answer the challenges of technology-based sexual violence.

The phenomenon of revenge porn and revictimization of victims is part of the transformation of forms of sexual violence that previously occurred in physical space, now turning to digital space. This transition has not been fully followed by the readiness of the legal and social systems in responding to its complexity. Therefore, in-depth studies based on modern victimology and social studies approaches need to be conducted to understand the dimensions of power, control, and injustice experienced by revenge porn victims, as well as to formulate comprehensive preventive and curative measures.

Based on this description, the research questions proposed in this study are as follows:

- 1) How is revictimization experienced by female victims in revenge porn cases?
- 2) What is the role of digital media in exacerbating or strengthening the revictimization process?
- 3) What are the legal and social challenges faced by victims in obtaining protection and justice?
- 4) What are the strategies and policy recommendations that can be used to prevent and overcome cases of revenge porn and revictimization in Indonesia?

The novelty of this research lies in the in-depth exploration of the interaction between digital media and revictimization in the context of sexual violence against women in Indonesia, which until now has been little studied systematically. This research also offers an interdisciplinary approach between victimology, criminology, gender studies, and legal policy that is rarely developed in similar studies in Indonesia. With this approach, it is hoped that the research results will be able to make theoretical and practical contributions to the development of a victim protection system that is more responsive to the development of digital-based sexual violence.

The study of victimology has undergone significant developments in the last decade, particularly in understanding how victims of crime suffer not only from the initial criminal act, but also from the social systems and structures that respond to it. Revictimization has become one of the central concepts in modern victimology theory, referring to victims' experiences of being harmed or harmed again as a result of negative responses from law enforcement officials, the media, or society at large (Spohn & Tellis, 2014). In the context of digital sexual violence, revictimization often occurs when victims are blamed, harassed, or denied equal justice.

In feminist criminology theory, sexual violence, including revenge porn, is understood as a product of unequal power relations between men and women. This theory highlights that patriarchal social systems shape power structures that enable domination over women's bodies and sexuality (Jewkes et al., 2015). The dissemination of intimate content without consent is not just an invasion of privacy, but also a form of sexual control by the perpetrator to maintain dominance. In other words, revenge porn is a tool of digital patriarchy that ensnares victims in shame, fear and loss of control over their own bodies.

The concept of cybervictimization is also important in understanding this context. According to Patchin and Hinduja (2018), cybervictimization is a form of victimization that occurs through digital media, where the perpetrator uses technology to intimidate, humiliate, or exploit the victim. Revenge porn cases fall into this category because the dissemination of explicit content is done through the internet, social media, or online forums with the aim of bringing down the victim's reputation. This phenomenon shows that the internet is not only a communication tool, but also a new space of power where serious violations of human rights occur.

In a legal context, secondary victimization theory explains how victims of sexual violence are often subjected to hurtful treatment from the justice system itself. Campbell et al. (2016) found that many victims feel re-shamed when facing a legal process that tends to be insensitive to trauma, for example through prejudicial questioning, coercive mediation, or ignoring reports. This creates distrust of law enforcement and exacerbates

the psychological state of victims. In Indonesia, this is reflected in the many cases that end up outside formal legal channels due to social pressure or failures of the legal system.

The sexual script theory developed by Simon and Gagnon (1986) and reiterated by Wiederman (2015), states that sexual behavior is influenced by cultural norms and social scenarios. In revenge porn, the perpetrator often feels entitled to the victim's body because of previous intimate relationships. When the victim refuses, the perpetrator feels "betrayed" and feels entitled to take revenge by spreading sexual content. This reflects how social constructions of sexuality and ownership of women's bodies can perpetuate technology-based sexual violence.

A contemporary study of gender-based online harms by Henry and Powell (2018) also emphasizes the importance of understanding revenge porn as a structured form of gender-based violence, rather than simply personal conflict. They explain that technology is used to continue forms of violence that were previously physical or verbal into the digital realm. The online dissemination of intimate content creates long-term effects for victims, ranging from reputational damage, job loss, severe depression, to suicide. Therefore, the approach to revenge porn should involve legal, social and psychological aspects in an integrated manner.

Finally, the intersectionality approach developed by Crenshaw (1989) and expanded in contemporary studies such as by Gill and Hilder (2021), suggests that the experiences of victims of digital sexual violence cannot be separated from their multiple identities-such as gender, age, social class, and sexual orientation. Women from marginalized groups such as youth, ethnic minorities, or economically weak tend to be more vulnerable to revictimization due to limited access to justice and recovery resources. Therefore, victim protection should be inclusive and responsive to the diversity of victims' experiences.

## II. METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to explore in depth the experiences of women as victims of technology-based *revenge porn* and sexual *blackmail*. This approach was chosen because it is able to reveal the meaning, perception, and socio-psychological impact from the perspective of the research subject (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The purpose of this approach is not to generalize, but to gain a contextual understanding of the phenomenon of revictimization experienced by women in gender and technology-based power relations.

Data collection techniques were carried out through three stages: literature study, digital media observation, and in-depth interviews. The literature study was conducted on scientific journals, official reports, and legal documents related to victimology, digital sexual violence, and *gender-based violence*. The main references were taken from indexed international journals such as *Violence Against Women*, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, and *Feminist Criminology* within the last 10 years. The purpose of this study is to strengthen the theoretical framework and find research gaps that can be answered through field studies.

Non-participatory observations were conducted on various digital platforms such as social media, anonymous forums, and online communities where *revenge porn* practices often occur. This observation was conducted to understand patterns, narratives, and community responses to cases of non-consensual sexual content dissemination. In practice, researchers look at the content of comments, articles, and posts that reflect patterns of revictimization or justification of the perpetrator. This technique is relevant in the study of digital media-based crime as recommended by Hutchings and Holt (2015) in the study of cybercrime.

The main stage of this research was in-depth interviews with three female victims of *revenge porn* and sexual *blackmail*. A purposive sampling technique was used in selecting informants, with the main criteria being: (1) women aged at least 17 years, (2) have been victims of sexual content dissemination without consent, and (3) willing to share their experiences openly. Interviews were conducted online in consideration of the safety and privacy of the informants. Each informant was given a pseudonym to protect their identity. The interview data were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis method as described by Braun & Clarke (2006), to identify narrative patterns that reflect revictimization.

The entire research process followed the ethical principles of social research, including informed consent, data confidentiality, and empathy for informants' trauma. The researcher also coordinated with professional counselors to ensure that the interviews did not worsen the psychological condition of the victims. In the context of sexual violence, a trauma-sensitive approach is essential, as recommended by Campbell et al. (2019) in their research on victims of gender-based violence. Data validity was strengthened through source triangulation and member checking with informants, to ensure the accuracy and validity of the data collected.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research has uncovered a number of important findings related to the dynamics of revictimization experienced by female victims of *revenge porn* in Indonesia. Based on the results of in-depth interviews with

three informants (X, Y, and Z), it was found that the pattern of spreading sexual content without consent is always accompanied by systemic and repeated acts of *blackmail*. Victims are forced to fulfill the perpetrator's sexual demands under the threat of spreading their intimate videos or images. This psychological pressure puts victims in a helpless position, where they continue to be blackmailed physically, emotionally, and even economically.

From the three informants, it is known that the perpetrators are generally people closest to the victim, such as boyfriends or ex-boyfriends. This is in accordance with the findings of Komnas Perempuan (2020), which states that sexual violence in intimate relationships is the most common form, even higher than sexual violence by strangers. This personal relationship complicates the situation because victims often feel emotionally attached and experience a dilemma between reporting or maintaining the relationship, especially when there are emotional ties or economic dependence.

Revictimization occurs when victims try to seek justice. Informants X and Z said that they received negative responses when they tried to report their cases. Family, friends, and even law enforcement questioned why they wanted to be recorded or have intercourse in the first place. This form of *victim blaming* is very real and shows that the social system is not in favor of victims. This phenomenon is reinforced by the study of Campbell et al. (2016), which states that the criminal justice system is often a source of *secondary victimization*, especially for women victims of sexual violence.

In the context of digital media, findings from field observations show that anonymous sites or forums are a fertile space for the spread of *revenge porn*. The case of informant Y shows that the perpetrator recorded *video call sex* and then used it to blackmail the victim. This finding reinforces Henry and Powell's (2018) study, which states that *image-based sexual abuse* develops through online platforms that provide space for anonymity and impunity. In cases like this, perpetrators feel that they will not be traced, making them more courageous in committing sexual exploitation.

The psychological impact experienced by victims is profound. Informant X experienced acute anxiety disorder and decreased self-esteem. Informant Z admitted to attempting suicide due to the constant pressure. Symptoms of depression, feelings of alienation, and loss of control over life were also found in Citron and Franks' (2014) study, which examined the long-term effects of *revenge porn*. Trauma not only stems from the perpetrator's initial actions, but is compounded by victim-blaming social responses and a lack of recovery support.

The phenomenon of *control through shame* is the main pattern in the relationship between perpetrators and victims. The perpetrators use shame as a weapon to control the victim. The fear of spreading the content encourages the victim to continue to comply with the perpetrator's wishes. This is in line with Bloom's (2014) findings, which state that *revenge porn perpetrators* are not only motivated by revenge, but also by the desire to dominate and publicly humiliate the victim. Socially constructed shame is a very effective tool of gender oppression.

Another interesting finding is how social media has become a tool for the rapid spread of nonconsensual sexual content. Even when the victim has successfully reported and deleted the content on one platform, the content has spread widely and been reposted in many places. This situation shows that digital systems have *non-forgetful* characteristics, supporting the argument of the importance of the *right to be forgotten*. A study by Mayer-Schönberger (2011) reinforces this by stating that digital data has a lasting memory that is difficult to control, thus requiring a progressive legal approach.

Regarding the legal dimension, victims experience confusion because there is no article that explicitly protects them in the context of *revenge porn*. The articles used in the ITE Law or the Criminal Code generally relate to decency, not to the right to bodily integrity and privacy. Informant Y even mentioned that he was denied a report because he was considered to have participated in the creation of the content. This reflects the weak understanding of the law on digital sexual violence. In Cristianto's (2017) study, it was highlighted that Indonesia's legal framework tends to be conservative and has not adapted to the dynamics of technology-based sexual crimes.

All informants expressed a strong desire to speak up and report their cases, but limited legal protection and social threats made them choose to remain silent. In this context, trauma-informed restorative approaches and victims' rights are crucial. Research by Daly (2014) shows that restorative justice can provide a space for victims to voice their suffering, gain validation and restore control over their lives. However, in Indonesia, this approach has not been institutionalized in the formal legal system, especially in cases of sexual violence.

Overall, the findings of this study show that *revenge porn* is not just an invasion of privacy, but a systematic form of sexual violence and revictimization. Women are not only objects in videos, but also objects of ongoing social punishment. Digital media, patriarchal culture and legal laxity interact to exacerbate victims' suffering. Therefore, an interdisciplinary approach and pro-victim policy reforms are needed to prevent and mitigate technology-based sexual violence in Indonesia.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

This research reveals that *revenge porn* is a form of technology-based sexual violence that has a multidimensional impact on victims, especially women. In the various cases studied, the act of spreading nonconsensual sexual content is always accompanied by long-term emotional and sexual blackmail. This process creates a situation of layered revictimization, where victims not only suffer from the actions of the perpetrator, but also from the social and legal systems that have not been on their side. Digital media exacerbates revictimization by massively disseminating content and creating social trauma that is difficult to recover from.

The patriarchal culture, weak legal system, and lack of public literacy about digital sexual violence also amplify the suffering of victims. In many cases, victims experience *victim blaming*, social stigma, and the failure of the justice system to provide proper protection and recovery. The three informants in this study showed similar patterns, namely the dominance of the perpetrator, social fear, and limited safe space to report or recover.

#### Recommendation

- 1) Legal Reform: Urge the passing of special regulations governing technology-based sexual violence, including revenge porn, such as the Elimination of Sexual Violence Bill and the strict application of the "Right to be Forgotten".
- 2) Digital Education: Strengthening digital literacy, especially for adolescents and young women, to understand digital rights and the risks of online violence.
- 3) Psychosocial Support: Provision of victim-friendly trauma counseling and rehabilitation services, including legal assistance, psychological counseling, and identity protection.
- 4) Digital Platform Policy: The government should encourage cooperation with digital platform providers to have a quick and effective mechanism to remove *revenge porn* content.

#### Theoretical Implications

This research strengthens *feminist criminology* and *victimology* approaches by showing that digital sexual violence is a new form of patriarchal domination that migrates to cyberspace. The findings extend the concepts of *revictimization* and *secondary victimization* in the context of digital media, and demonstrate the need for integration between victimological, legal, and media studies approaches in understanding contemporary gender-based violence.

#### Practical Implications

For legal practitioners, police, counselors, and victim advocates, the results of this study provide an understanding that *revenge porn* is not just a moral offense, but a serious form of crime that requires integrated and trauma-sensitive handling. A special SOP (standard operating procedure) is needed in handling reports of digital sexual violence so that victims do not experience re-violence during the legal process.

#### Managerial Implications

Educational institutions, ministries and NGOs should make digital sexual violence a strategic issue in social risk management. There is a need for internal policies to prevent, handle, and protect victims of *revenge porn* within the organization, especially for educational institutions, digital platforms, and youth communities. In addition, social media managers should be trained to recognize and handle sexual violence content in an ethical and timely manner.

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