




The relationship between parent child relationship and online grooming risk among early adolescents in Agam Regency

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the relationship between the parent-child relationship and online grooming risk in early adolescents in Agam Regency. The increase in internet use among adolescents is followed by an increased risk of online crime, including online grooming, which the victim is often unaware of. Early adolescents are highly vulnerable due to their need for social affiliation and their limited ability to recognize the risks of online interactions. This study uses a quantitative, correlational design. The study participants were 180 adolescents aged 13-17 years, selected using incidental sampling. Data were collected using the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA) and the Online Grooming Risk Scale (OGR-S). Data analysis uses Pearson product-moment correlation. Results showed a significant negative relationship between parent-child relationship and online grooming risk ($r = -0.735$). These findings show that the parent-child relationship has the potential to be a protective factor in reducing the risk of online grooming in early adolescents.

Keywords: parent child relationship, online grooming risk, early adolescents

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1. Introduction

Sexual violence against children remains a critical and rising issue in Indonesia. Data from SIMFONI PPA in 2025 reports 348 cases in West Sumatera Province and 47 in Agam Regency (Kementrian PPPA, 2025). Advances in information and communication technology have expanded sexual violence from direct interactions to digital spaces, making these patterns more complex in the digital era (Susiana et al., 2019).

The increase in internet access among adolescents also increases the likelihood of these risks. A survey by the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII, 2025) shows that the number of internet users under 18 continues to increase. Early adolescents, aged 13-17, are a group that actively uses the internet for various purposes, such as social communication, entertainment, and academic activities (Hurlock, 2011). However, the high use of the internet is not always balanced with the cognitive and emotional ability to recognize the risks of online interactions, thereby increasing vulnerability to digital crime (Dorasamy et al., 2021).

One form of digital crime that occurs frequently is online grooming. Online grooming refers to a manipulative process in which an adult (the perpetrator) gradually builds relationships with children or adolescents using internet-based communication. The perpetrator uses online messages or conversations to earn the young person's trust and comply with the young person's wishes, while also working to keep their interactions confidential (Craven et al., 2006). In this context, 'grooming' means establishing a sense of trust and emotional connection with the victim. This process often goes unnoticed by the victim because it is disguised as attention, empathy, and supportive relationships. From the victim's perspective, the interaction can feel normal and safe, even though it gradually leads to manipulation and exploitation (Lorenzo-Dus & Kinzel, 2020).

As scientific studies develop, online grooming is no longer understood only as an event of sexual exploitation that has occurred, but as a spectrum of risks. Here, 'online grooming risk' refers to the condition

of adolescents' vulnerability to manipulation or the grooming process before sexual exploitation occurs (Pasca et al., 2022). In this context, 'early relational dynamics' refers to interactions, particularly intimacy and secrecy, that increase the likelihood of grooming (Whittle et al., 2013).

In practice, online grooming risks often start with seemingly normal interactions, such as light conversations about daily activities or emotional states. The perpetrators' communication patterns are implicit and relational, making it difficult to recognize them as threats. This approach gradually builds a sense of security and trust, while lowering adolescents' alertness (Lorenzo-Dus & Kinzel, 2020). This condition is increasingly risky for early adolescents who lack the ability to identify social manipulation in the digital environment. Adolescents' vulnerability to online grooming risk cannot be separated from their developmental characteristics. Early adolescents are in a phase of self-identity, have a strong need for social affiliation, and require emotional acceptance and validation (King, 2023). Under certain conditions, this need can encourage adolescents to seek emotional support outside the family environment, including through online interactions. This opens up opportunities for groomers to exploit these needs as a manipulation loophole (Whittle et al., 2014).

In addition to individual factors, family factors play an important role in determining adolescents' vulnerability to online grooming risks. Parental conflict, low family satisfaction, and a lack of parental involvement and supervision of children's online activities are significant risk factors (Whittle et al., 2014). In contrast, a positive parent-child relationship can serve as a protective factor, reducing these risks.

The quality of parent-child relationships is an important aspect of family dynamics that reflects communication patterns, emotional attachments, and parental involvement in children's lives. From an attachment-theory perspective, parent-child relationships are dynamic and reciprocal, shaping adolescents' emotional and social development (Lamb & Lewis, 2010). This relationship includes the dimensions of trust, communication, and low levels of anger and alienation (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987).

A warm, open, and supportive parent-child relationship allows adolescents to feel emotionally secure, enabling them to better develop adaptive emotional regulation and make appropriate social decisions. Adolescents with good relationship quality tend to be more open with their parents, including when sharing potentially risky online experiences (Lamb & Lewis, 2010). In contrast, less harmonious relationships characterized by low communication and emotional engagement can encourage adolescents to seek affection and validation outside of the family, which ultimately increases vulnerability to online grooming risk.

A quality parent-child relationship theoretically forms secure attachment, laying the groundwork for healthy relational boundaries. As a result, teens with secure attachments are less likely to build intimacy with strangers or keep their online interactions secret. In contrast, alienation and low communication in relationships increase tendencies toward secrecy and intimacy in online relationships, both key indicators of grooming risk (Post et al., 2022; Whittle et al., 2013).

From the perspective of ecological systems theory, the family is the primary microsystem that directly influences individual development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The quality of family interaction plays a key role as the main filter in dealing with the influence of the wider environment, including the digital world. When family protective functions are well performed, adolescents are better able to recognize and avoid the risks of online interactions.

Preliminary findings obtained through an initial interview conducted in October 2025 with a forensic psychologist from the Department of Women and Child Protection (DPPA) of Agam Regency indicated several risky online behaviours among adolescents, including intensive communication with strangers, excessive emotional attention, and involvement in private online interactions without parental supervision. These findings suggest the presence of online grooming risk, even though not all cases had developed into actual sexual exploitation. Despite growing research on online grooming risk, few studies specifically address the parent-child relationship as a protective factor, particularly within Indonesia. Most existing work emphasizes individual risk factors and online behavior over the effects of family dynamics on adolescent vulnerability. However, the parent-child relationship fundamentally shapes adolescents' emotional regulation and social decision-making.

Although studies on online grooming risk have continued to develop, most previous studies have primarily focused on identifying adolescents' vulnerabilities, risky online behaviours, and the development of measurement instruments for online grooming risk (Pasca et al., 2022; Whittle et al., 2014). Research specifically examining parent-child relationship as a protective factor against online grooming risk remains limited, particularly among early adolescents in the Indonesian cultural context. Therefore, this study attempts to fill this gap by examining the relationship between the parent-child relationship and online grooming risk among early adolescents in Agam Regency. This study aims to examine the relationship between the parent-child relationship and online grooming risk in early adolescents in Agam Regency. This research is expected

to contribute to strengthening understanding of the family's role as a protective factor in the context of online interaction risk. Based on the theoretical framework and previous empirical findings, this study hypothesizes that there is a relationship between the parent-child relationship and online grooming risk among early adolescents in Agam Regency.

2. Method

This study used a quantitative correlational design to examine the relationship between parent-child relationships and online grooming risk in early adolescence. The participants of this study were 180 adolescents aged 13-17 years who lived in Agam Regency and actively used smartphones. The sampling technique used was incidental sampling. This technique was selected because the participants were adolescents who met the inclusion criteria and were accessible during the data collection period.

Data were collected using questionnaires consisting of the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA) and the Online Grooming Risk Scale (OGR-S). Before participating in the study, respondents were informed of the research's purpose and the confidentiality of their responses. Participation in this study was voluntary.

Parent-child relationship was measured using the Indonesian version of the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA), which had previously been adapted and validated by Safaria et al. (2024). The Online Grooming Risk Scale (OGR-S) was adapted by the researcher following Beaton's cross-cultural adaptation guidelines, including translation, synthesis, back-translation, expert judgement, and preliminary testing procedures.

Before hypothesis testing, the Indonesian version of the OGR-S was tested for item discrimination, validity, and reliability. One item was removed as it did not meet the corrected item-total correlation criterion ($<.30$). The final instrument demonstrated acceptable reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of .738.

Pearson's correlation was used to analyze the association between parent-child relationships and online grooming risk. Assumptions such as normality and linearity were tested. Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS version 29.

3. Result

The results of the normality test indicated that both variables were normally distributed, as determined by the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The parent-child relationship variable obtained a significance value of $p = .074$ ($p > .05$). Therefore, the data met the assumption of normality, and the analysis was continued using parametric techniques, namely Pearson product-moment correlation analysis, as shown in Table 1:

Table 1. Normality Test Results

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Parent Child Relationship	.063	180	.074
Online Grooming Risk	.053	180	.200*

The results of the linearity test showed that the relationship between the parent-child relationship and online grooming risk was linear. This was indicated by the linearity test significance value ($p < .001$) and the deviation-from-linearity value ($p = .083$; $p > .05$), indicating no significant deviation from linearity. Therefore, the relationship between the two variables met the assumption of linearity, as presented in Table 2:

Table 2. Linearity Test Results

			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Online Grooming Risk	Between	(Combined)	3787.988	41	92.390	6.916	<.001
* Parent Child Relationship	Groups	Linearity	3044.254	1	3044.254	227.897	<0.001
		Deviation from Linearity	743.733	40	18.593	1.392	.083
	Within Groups		1843.407	138	13.358		
	Total		5631.394	179			

The results of the Pearson product-moment correlation test showed a significant negative relationship between the parent-child relationship and online grooming risk $r = -.735$, $p < .001$. This finding indicates that higher quality parent-child relationships are associated with lower levels of online grooming risk among early adolescents, as presented in Table 3:

Table 3. Correlation Test Results

Parent Relationship	Child Online Grooming Risk

Pearson	Parent Relationship	Child	Correlation	1	-.735**
			Coefficient		
		Sig. (2-tailed)			<.001
		N	180	180	
	Online Grooming Risk	Child	Correlation	-.735**	1
			Coefficient		
		Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001		
		N	180	180	

4. Discussion

The results of the study showed that there was a significant negative relationship between the parent-child relationship and online grooming risk in early adolescents in Agam Regency. These findings confirm that the quality of parent-child relationships plays a protective factor in reducing adolescents' vulnerability to risky online interactions.

Theoretically, these results are in line with the attachment theory perspective, which states that warm and secure relationships contribute to the development of adaptive regulation of emotions and social behaviours (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987; Lamb & Lewis, 2010). Adolescents with good relationships with their parents tend to have open communication and do not rely on external validation, which helps them avoid manipulative online relationships.

These findings are relevant to relationship intimacy and secrecy as key risk indicators (Pasca et al., 2022). Adolescents who communicate openly are less likely to hide online activity or form close bonds with strangers. Conversely, less harmonious relationships may drive the search for affection outside the family, increasing vulnerability to manipulation.

These findings are supported by prior research showing that family factors, such as parental conflict, low family satisfaction, and parental involvement, increase adolescents' vulnerability to online grooming (Whittle et al., 2013; Whittle et al., 2014). However, a positive parent-child relationship is a protective factor reducing this risk.

A high correlation ($r = -0.735$) suggests a strong relationship, indicating that family factors play a significant role in shaping adolescent online behavior. However, the contribution of these factors should be interpreted cautiously, as other factors, such as internet use intensity, individual traits, and social environment, were not measured.

This research has several limitations. First, the use of incidental (non-random) sampling techniques restricts the generalizability of the results to the wider population. Second, reliance on self-reported data introduces the possibility of social desirability bias, which may affect response accuracy. Therefore, future research is recommended to employ more representative sampling methods and to explore additional variables that may influence the findings.

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