



## Efforts of DPPA in Palembang to Provide Early Psychological Support for Teenage Victims of Digital Sexual Violence

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Cases of violence against children and women, especially sexual violence, are still a serious problem. The psychological impact of cases like this cannot be considered trivial. Victims can experience excessive anxiety, depression, guilt, and loss of self-confidence. Early Psychological Support (EPS) or Psychological First Aid (PFA) is an initial approach to help individuals experiencing crisis, trauma, or emotional distress. **Methods:** The approach used in this report is a descriptive qualitative approach to understand the outpatient rehabilitation process in depth. This research was conducted at the Department of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection of South Sumatra City. The intervention used in this case study was Early Psychological Support (EPS) intervention on sexual violence victims. Data collection was carried out in three ways: Participatory Observation, Case Study, and Documentation. The analysed data were in the form of documents resulting from CBT interventions. **Result:** Early Psychological Support (EPS) intervention conducted by DPPPA showed that the subject experienced significant positive changes. After receiving the intervention, the subject began to dare to open up and share his feelings with his closest friends. He also took a firm step by deleting his old Instagram account, which was previously associated with a traumatic experience. This behavioural change demonstrates the effectiveness of EPS in facilitating the subject's psychological recovery process. **Conclusion:** Early Psychological Support (EPS) provided by the Palembang City DPPPA has proven effective in helping recovery process. A collaborative approach between the school and the DPPPA was a key factor in the successful handling of this case.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Currently, forms of violence are increasingly developing [1]. No longer limited to physical occurrences but also spreading into the digital world Digital sexual violence is one of the most worrying forms of violence, especially for teenagers who actively use the internet and social media. This form of violence can be in the form of threats, coercion, distribution of personal photos or videos without permission, or even invitations that lead to online sexual harassment. Sadly, many teenagers who become victims are not even aware that they are experiencing violence [2], [3].

Teenagers often do not have a sufficient understanding of the dangers of digital sexual violence and how to protect themselves in the digital space. They also tend to be afraid to tell stories because they feel embarrassed, afraid of being blamed, or do not know who to complain to. This makes many victims choose to remain silent and keep their trauma to themselves [4]. If not handled properly, this trauma can have long-term impacts on their mental health and social development [5].

This condition makes the role of institutions such as the Women's Empowerment and Child Protection Service (DPPPA) very important. They are not only tasked with handling cases legally but are also responsible for providing comprehensive protection, including psychological protection [6]. The approach taken by the Palembang City DPPPA is quite comprehensive, starting from counselling services and referrals to professional psychologists and coaching so that victims can return to their activities with confidence. However, there are still significant challenges that must be addressed, particularly in terms of limited resources and access to community services.

In addition, many people still do not realize the importance of the role of early psychological support for victims of digital sexual violence [7]. Some families of victims even choose to cover up the case in order to protect the family's good name. This attitude makes the victim feel even more depressed and does not get proper protection [8]. Therefore, education for the community regarding the importance of psychological assistance is something that also needs to be strengthened by the DPPPA and related parties.

Cases of violence against children and women, especially sexual violence, are still a serious problem. Based on data from the South Sumatra Women's Empowerment and Child Protection Service (DPPPA), cases of sexual violence against women in 2022 reached 101 victims, and the average age was 13-17 years, with a high school/equivalent education level. The total number of cases of violence in South Sumatra in 2020 was 341 cases. This number decreased by 6.58% compared to the previous year's 365 cases.

The widespread use of applications such as Telegram by teenagers opens up new opportunities for perpetrators of digital sexual violence [9]. The most common approach is to pretend to be a peer or even offer a special relationship, then gradually tempt the victim with a sum of money. This lure can tempt some teenagers, especially those experiencing economic pressure or a lack of attention from their surroundings. This is what is then used by the perpetrator to ask the victim to send photos or videos of sexual content [10].

Unfortunately, many victims do not realize that they are experiencing a form of digital sexual violence. They assume that sending personal photos or videos based on mutual consent is not a problem, even though it can be the beginning of blackmail, the distribution of content without permission, and even severe psychological threats. When the content is spread or used for blackmail, the victim will feel ashamed and afraid and can even withdraw from their social environment [11]. The psychological impact of cases like this cannot be considered trivial. Victims can experience excessive anxiety, depression, guilt, and loss of self-confidence [12]. Some even experience sleep disorders or difficulty concentrating at school. If not treated immediately, this trauma can have long-term impacts on adolescent development [13]. This is why early psychological support is a crucial component of the victim's recovery process.

Early Psychological Support (EPS) or Psychological First Aid (PFA) is an initial approach to help individuals experiencing crisis, trauma, or emotional distress. Developed by Jeffrey T. Mitchell in 1983, EPS aims to reduce the impact of stress and prevent more serious mental disorders. This approach emphasizes rapid assistance, emotional support, empathetic communication, and connecting victims with professional services. EPS is not an in-depth therapy and can be carried out by anyone who is trained, including non-specialist officers. In the context of violence against women and children, EPS is important to prevent deeper psychological damage. The Look, Listen, and Link principle, developed by the IFRC (2020), serves as the basis for its implementation in support of effective victim recovery. This principle involves taking steps to observe the victim's situation and needs (look), listening with empathy and attention (listen), and connecting victims to available resources and follow-up services (link). With this approach, the psychological recovery process can take place more optimally and sustainably. This study aims to find out and understand the efforts made by the Palembang City Women's Empowerment and Child Protection Service (DPPPA) in providing initial psychological support to adolescents who are victims of digital sexual violence.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

The approach used in this report is a descriptive qualitative approach to understand the outpatient rehabilitation process in depth. This research was conducted at the Department of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection of South Sumatra City. The intervention used in this case study was Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) intervention on sexual violence victims. Data collection was carried out in three ways: Participatory Observation, Case Study, and Documentation. The analysed data were in the form of documents resulting from CBT interventions.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. Results

#### 3.1.1. Assessment

Client R is a 17-year-old female high school student. R is the first of two siblings who lives with her parents and her younger brother, who is still in elementary school. Her father works as an interprovincial truck driver, so he often travels out of town and is rarely at home. Meanwhile, her mother acts as a homemaker, taking care of the family's daily needs. In terms of economy, R's family is classified as a lower middle class. Although the family's basic needs can still be met, limited time and attention from parents, especially the father, who is rarely physically present, has an impact on the lack of emotional closeness in the family. R herself admitted to having a less warm relationship with her parents. She felt she did not have a safe space to express her feelings or discuss personal problems.

The family situation, with minimal communication and lack of emotional support, made R grow into a closed person. She tends to seek escape in the digital world, primarily through social media, where she feels freer, heard, and connected to others.

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### 3.1.2. Observation

#### a. Look Stage

The first step taken by the school and the DPPPA was to assess R's overall emotional and behavioral conditions. The symptoms of psychological stress shown by R were obvious, such as drastic changes in behavior, withdrawal from the social environment, difficulty sleeping, and loss of appetite. The Guidance and Counseling Teacher at the school also observed a decrease in R's concentration and enthusiasm for learning in class.

*"Initially, he was often absent, even though previously he was quite active. But since the beginning of that week, he looked gloomy and unfocused in class,"* said R's BK teacher in a mentoring interview.

In addition, R's facial expression, which looked restless and anxious during the initial consultation session, was also an indicator that he was experiencing severe emotional stress.

#### b. Listen to Stage

After the initial observation, the next approach is to listen with empathy. The Guidance and Counseling (BK) teacher acts as the first party who actively listens to R's story without judging, creating a safe space for R to open up. In the initial counselling session, R was finally able to reveal the entire chronology of events, including the emotional stress he experienced, persuasion from the perpetrator, and the form of threats he received.

*"At first, I did not want to send the photo, but he said that I did not love him. Then... when I had sent it, he threatened to spread it. I panicked, embarrassed, afraid that everyone would know,"* said R in an interview session with the counsellor.

This statement illustrates the intense emotional pressure felt by R, including feelings of guilt, fear, and a loss of control. Active listening helped R feel less alone and built trust, allowing them to receive further assistance.

#### c. Link Stage

After successfully building trust, the next stage was to connect R with the right source of assistance. The BK teacher immediately took preventive steps by referring this case to the Palembang City Women's Empowerment and Child Protection Service (DPPPA). DPPPA then provided initial intervention in the form of Early Psychological Support (EPS) to help stabilize R's emotional condition. In this process, R was guided to recognize the emotions he was experiencing, learn relaxation techniques, and receive education about digital sexual violence and how to protect yourself in cyberspace.

*"I feel relieved after telling the story. I used to think it was all my fault, but it turned out that I was the victim. Now I am slowly learning to be calm,"* said R in the initial evaluation session after psychological assistance.

In addition to psychological assistance, R was also directed to receive legal education so that he understood his rights as a victim of digital sexual violence. With this support, R began to show signs of recovery, such as starting to interact again with friends and showing a slowly improving enthusiasm for learning.

### 3.2. Discussion

Case studies handled by the Palembang City Women's Empowerment and Child Protection Agency (DPPPA) reveal the profound impact of digital sexual violence on adolescents. The case of G.O. (15 years old), a female adolescent whose private photos were spread by her ex-boyfriend, showed symptoms of depression, anxiety, and extreme social withdrawal. She even experienced mild dissociation as a form of trauma response. Case B (17 years old), a male adolescent victim of sextortion, indicated the risk of suicidal thoughts and severe emotional distress due to shame and fear of self-reputation. Meanwhile, R (17 years old), a female adolescent victim of online manipulation and blackmail, experienced anxiety disorders, self-harm, and social isolation due to psychological pressure and deep guilt. These three cases show a consistent pattern in the perpetrators, namely using emotional closeness or manipulation to obtain intimate content, then intimidating or threatening, which leads to severe psychological damage for the victim. This condition is the impact of digital sexual violence on victims.

### 3.2.1. Impact of Digital Sexual Violence on Victims

Digital sexual violence experienced by victims in previous case studies showed very complex and diverse psychological impacts. Some of the main impacts that can be identified include:

#### a. Emotional and Psychological Disorders

The three victims experienced severe emotional stress, ranging from shame, fear, and anxiety to depression. For example, G.O. experienced sleep disorders, decreased interest in learning, and symptoms of anxiety and social isolation. B showed signs of moderate to severe depression with passive suicidal thoughts, while R experienced severe anxiety, insomnia, and self-harm behavior as a form of maladaptive coping.

#### b. Decreased Social and Academic Function

The impact of digital sexual violence also spread to social and educational functions. G and R experienced decreased interest in learning and withdrew from their social environment. B had stopped social and school activities because of fear and shame.

#### c. Stigma and Isolation

R specifically dealt with the fear of social stigma in the school environment, which made him even more protected. The fear of being bullied and being judged negatively is very addictive.

#### d. Dissociation and Psychosomatic

Some victims like G show symptoms of dissociation, a psychological mechanism to avoid emotional pain by "separating" themselves from the traumatic reality. Psychosomatic symptoms such as headaches and stomachaches also appear due to severe mental stress.

#### e. Trauma and Mental Instability

All victims are in a state of trauma that disrupts mental stability, characterized by extreme fear, inappropriate guilt, and a promise to tell their experiences consistently.

### 3.2.2. Effectiveness of Early Psychological Support

Early Psychological Support (EPS) provided by the Palembang City Women's Empowerment and Child Protection Service (DPPPA) has proven effective in helping to restore R's emotional and psychological condition as a victim of digital sexual violence. This intervention successfully stabilized R's emotional condition, which previously experienced symptoms of stress such as withdrawal, depression, difficulty sleeping, and loss of appetite. Through an empathetic and non-judgmental approach, R felt safe to open up and reveal the chronology of the events she experienced. She began to realize that she was a victim and not the one to blame, which is an important step in the trauma recovery process. In addition, R also received education about digital sexual violence and her rights as a victim, which helped her understand the situation more rationally and encouraged the emergence of adaptive behavior. The effectiveness of EPS was also evident from R's increased enthusiasm for learning at school, her courage to return to social interaction, and the sense of relief and calm she expressed after the mentoring session. This support was strengthened by good coordination between the school through the BK teacher and DPPPA, which enabled fast and targeted handling. With a holistic approach that encompasses emotional, educational, and legal aspects, EPS plays a crucial role in R's recovery process and helps prevent long-term psychological impacts.

The results of the Early Psychological Support (EPS) intervention carried out by DPPPA showed that the subject experienced significant positive changes. After receiving the intervention, the subject began to dare to open up and share his feelings with his closest friends. He also took the firm step of deleting his old Instagram account which was previously associated with a traumatic experience. This behavioral change shows the effectiveness of EPS in helping the subject's psychological recovery process. This finding is in line with a literature review by Giummarra et al. (2018), concluded that EPS can produce improvements in symptoms of PTSD, anxiety, and depression [14].

The Palembang City Women's Empowerment and Child Protection Service realizes that the approach to victims must be carried out carefully and empathetically. Cases like this require a safe space and companions that the victim can trust. By conducting various programs, such as counseling to help victims recover from trauma and return to functioning well in society. Therefore, through private and trauma-healing-based mentoring programs, the Office strives for victims to recover slowly and return to their social lives without fear or shame. Through this report, the author wants to examine in more depth the efforts made by the Women's Empowerment and Child Protection Office in providing psychological support for adolescent victims of digital sexual violence, as well as the challenges faced in the process.



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### 3.2.3.Challenges in Providing Initial Psychological Support

In implementing initial psychological support for victims of digital-based sexual violence, several challenges arise from various aspects, both internal to the victim and external conditions that affect the intervention process. Some of the main challenges faced by officers in the field include:

a. Closedness and Deep Shame

One of the main challenges in handling R's case is a closed attitude and deep feelings of shame. R is reluctant to talk about what he experienced because he is afraid of being blamed, ashamed of what happened and feels guilty about the situation he went through. During the initial counselling session, he struggled to express his feelings openly. The process of building trust (rapport) with the Guidance and Counseling (BK) teacher requires time, an empathetic approach, and patience to create a safe space that makes R feel heard and not judged. This closeness is also reinforced by the lack of emotional support from the family, so R previously did not have a safe place to share their feelings.

b. Unstable Emotional Condition

R shows various signs of quite serious emotional disturbance, such as drastic changes in behavior, a tendency to withdraw from the social environment, sleep disorders, loss of appetite, and a significant decrease in enthusiasm for learning. This condition shows that psychologically, R is in a crisis phase due to emotional stress from the digital sexual violence he experienced. In such situations, the intervention process must be carried out with great care, as an incorrect approach can exacerbate the problem. Counsellors need to use non-confrontational communication techniques and position themselves as empathetic listeners to avoid re traumatization.

c. Lack of Social Support from Family

R comes from a family that lacks emotional closeness. His father is rarely at home because he works as an inter-provincial driver, while his mother, although she lives in the same house, does not provide enough emotional support. R feels that he lacks the space to express his feelings or discuss personal problems within the family. This lack of communication makes R seek comfort in digital spaces, which ultimately becomes an entry point for perpetrators to carry out emotional manipulation. This condition is a significant obstacle in the recovery process because the victim's closest environment is not a source of support.

d. Fear of Social Impact and Reputation

R's fear of the spread of her personal photo content became a source of extraordinary anxiety. She was worried that her reputation at school and in the community would be destroyed if the incident was widely spread. The negative stigma from society towards victims of sexual violence, especially in the digital context, made R feel helpless and reluctant to seek help at first. This anxiety also worsened her psychological condition and became an obstacle in the process of disclosing and reporting the incident.

e. Lack of Digital Literacy and Legal Understanding

Initially, R did not fully realize that she was a victim of digital-based sexual violence. She thought that the fault was hers for sending personal photos. This lack of understanding made R feel guilty, and they did not dare to tell others about the incident. Education provided by the DPPPA regarding what digital sexual violence is, as well as an explanation of victim rights and applicable legal protection, is one of the important interventions so that R can recover and realize that she is not alone and deserves justice.

f. Limited Time and Resources for Assistance

The initial psychological assistance process requires continuity so that the recovery process runs effectively. However, in practice, field officers, such as those from the DPPPA and BK teachers, often have to handle numerous cases within a limited timeframe. As a result, the attention given is not always optimal. The approach, which should be in-depth and continuous, is sometimes hindered by tight schedules and a limited workforce, thereby affecting the optimal intervention results for R.

g. Limited Knowledge and Capacity of Field Officers

Although officers from the DPPPA and BK teachers have received basic training in psychological intervention, they are not professional clinical psychologists with expertise in in-depth trauma assessment. Assistance for complex cases of digital-based sexual violence, such as that experienced by R, requires a trauma-based approach that field officers have not fully mastered. This lack of capacity is a challenge in ensuring that interventions are carried out

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according to scientific principles and do not have further impacts on the victim's psychological condition. Therefore, collaboration with psychologists or mental health professionals is essential in cases like this.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Early Psychological Support (EPS) provided by the Palembang City DPPPA has proven effective in helping R's recovery process. Interventions were carried out in stages through observation, empathetic approaches, and providing education related to digital sexual violence. As a result, R began to exhibit emotional recovery, including increased enthusiasm for learning, the courage to socialise again, and an awareness that he has the right to protection and justice. The collaborative approach between the school and the DPPPA is a key factor in the successful handling of this case.

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