

# Online Gender Based Violence as Symbolic Violence: Rethinking Digital Gender Inequality in Indonesia

Prihantiyani Margi Lestari

Sociology Program, Universitas Airlangga, Indonesia

\*Email Korespondensi: [prihantiyanimargilestari@gmail.com](mailto:prihantiyanimargilestari@gmail.com)

Lestari, P., M. (2026). Online Gender Based Violence as Symbolic Violence: Rethinking Digital Gender Inequality in Indonesia. *Varied Knowledge Journal*, 4(1), 568–582.  
<https://doi.org/10.71094/vkj.v4i1.417>

Diterima: 26-07-2026  
Direvisi: 09-08-2026  
Disetujui: 12-08-2026  
Publish: 13-08-2026



Copyright © 2026, The Author(s). This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International.

**Abstract:** *The research investigates the ways in which gender-based discrimination manifests itself through rising incidents of Online Gender Based Violence (OGBV) which take place on social media networks. The research study used qualitative methods which combined Feminist Participatory Action Research to study how women experience OGBV in online spaces. The study collected data through detailed interviews with five social media users who had encountered OGBV. The study findings proved that sexual violence is not only in the form of direct attacks, but also indirect violence, also known as symbolic violence, internalized through social norms and structures that reinforce gender inequality, including in the digital spaces. OGBV is an act that has psychological, social, and economic impacts on its victims and therefore needs to be combated in various ways. It is hoped that this research can contribute to combating OGBV by providing a cyberfeminist analysis in understanding OGBV as digital violence. This understanding is expected to change the public's perspective on OGBV, so that when such incidents occur, the first action is to side with the victim and blame the perpetrator, rather than the other way around.*

**Keywords:** Online Gender Based Violence (OGBV), Social Media, Gender Inequality, Symbolic Violence

**Abstrak:** Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana diskriminasi berbasis gender termanifestasi melalui meningkatnya kasus Kekerasan Berbasis Gender Daring (KBGO) yang terjadi di media sosial. Studi penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif yang menggabungkan Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) untuk mempelajari bagaimana pengalaman KBGO yang dialami perempuan di media sosial. Studi ini mengumpulkan data melalui wawancara mendalam dengan lima pengguna media sosial yang pernah mengalami KBGO. Temuan studi menunjukkan bahwa kekerasan seksual tidak hanya berupa serangan langsung, tetapi juga kekerasan tidak langsung, yang juga dikenal sebagai kekerasan simbolik, yang diinternalisasi melalui norma dan struktur sosial yang memperkuat ketidaksetaraan gender di ruang digital. KBGO adalah tindakan yang memberikan dampak psikologis, sosial, dan ekonomi pada korbannya, oleh karena itu perlu dilawan dengan berbagai cara. Diharapkan penelitian ini dapat berkontribusi dalam memerangi KBGO dengan memberikan analisis *cyberfeminism* dalam memahami KBGO sebagai bentuk kekerasan digital. Pemahaman ini diharapkan dapat mengubah perspektif publik tentang KBGO, sehingga ketika insiden tersebut terjadi, tindakan pertama adalah berpihak pada korban dan menyalahkan pelaku, bukan sebaliknya.

**Kata Kunci:** Kekerasan Berbasis Gender Online (KBGO), Media Sosial, Ketidaksetaraan Gender, Kekerasan Simbolik

## INTRODUCTION

The ability to establish social relationships has become more accessible to people because digital technology allows them to connect with others whenever and wherever they choose to interact. The internet together with digital media enables people to establish social connections while sharing personal information and content because they can easily communicate with others.

Social media serves as an online communication platform which allows users to participate in discussions while sharing information and producing new content (Rao et al., 2022). The situation has given rise to many social ills like Online Gender Based Violence (OGBV). The National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan) has noted that since 2015, cases of online violence against women have become increasingly complex due to technological advances. Data compiled by SAFEnet Indonesia indicates that in 2024, cases of Online Gender Based Violence (OGBV) will quadruple compared to 2023, with 480 cases (Kusuma & Arum, 2019). However, it must be remembered that this figure represents the tip of the iceberg, as the number obtained represents the number of reports, while many victims choose to remain silent and not report.

The concept of Online Gender Based Violence consists of three essential terms. The first term violence describes activities that involve forceful control and unwanted contact and physical attacks which create fear and make victims feel uneasy and damage their physical and mental well-being. The second key term is gender-based, meaning that the act of violence is committed by a party with a higher gender status or position toward a party with a lower gender status or position. In Indonesia, male gender identity exists as the most esteemed identity because both tradition and culture and religion view it as superior which leads to most violence cases being reported with male attackers who target female victims. The third key term is online which describes the way sexual violence takes place through online platforms that include social media (Mardiasih, 2024). The negative impacts of the digital age become evident through OGBV which operates through technology to sustain gender discrimination. Social media functions as a platform that enables gender-based violence in cyberspace. Online Gender Based Violence is a form of violence that harasses victims based on their gender identity and sexual orientation.

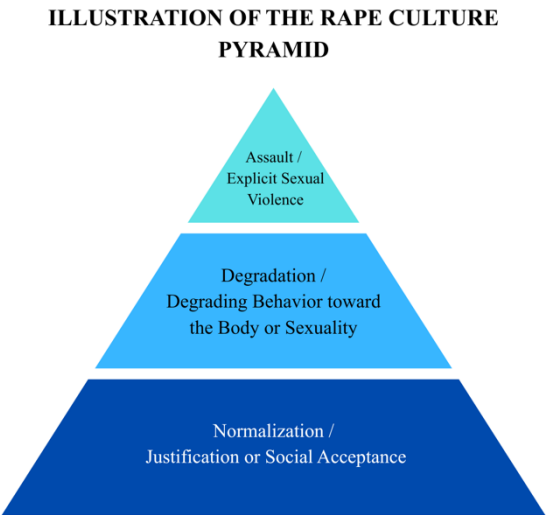


**Figure 1.** Illustration of Rape Culture

The social problem of Online Gender Based Violence develops through a combination of individual human behavior and the impact of social norms and institutional structures. The rape culture pyramid explains how Online Gender Based Violence occurs at a high frequency which results in repeated incidents throughout society. The pyramid explains that sexual harassment and violence occur because society contains three different ways to produce these criminal activities. The pyramid structure starts with Normalization as its fundamental level and moves to Degradation

which exists between Normalization and the peak point of explicit violence. Normalization functions as a stage where people develop derogatory behaviors toward those who belong to less powerful gender groups because they hold existing sexist and misogynistic beliefs. The common human behavior develops in public spaces through the process of accepting and regularizing sexual comments which people often treat as simple jokes. The pyramid's next stage consists of Degradation which shows sexist and misogynistic actions together with an absence of consent knowledge. People who lack knowledge about this subject matter will behave in ways that cause others to lose their personal value and dignity. This category of behavior includes catcalling which describes verbal harassment that includes whistling and kissing sounds and eye gestures that create discomfort for others together with the unauthorized recording or photographing of someone and sending genitalia images and stalking and victim-blaming. The pyramid's highest section contains Assault which shows violent acts that both violate personal body rights and create severe mental suffering for the people who experienced them. Examples of such acts include rape, including marital rape, sexual abuse, forced abortion, forced use of contraception, and ultimately the peak of patriarchal violence in the form of femicide, or the killing of women.

The Internet Governance Forum defines Online Gender Based Violence through a set of behaviors which includes stalking and sexual harassment and intimidation and defamation and exploitation and hate speech. Online Gender Based Violence happens when perpetrators use digital platforms to target victims with physical and sexual and psychological attacks that occur both online and offline. Online Gender Based Violence creates psychological harm which manifests as trauma and depression and anxiety and reduced self-esteem. Social impacts cause victims to experience social isolation while they stay away from public digital areas and their communities treat them with negative stigma. Online Gender Based Violence produces economic harm through two main effects because it damages victim reputations which result in employment termination while their future work possibilities become restricted. Online Gender Based Violence exists as a social manifestation of gender inequality which people experience in society. The violent acts which use digital platforms to attack women originate from cultural customs which permit men to maintain their dominance over women. The practice of discrimination started in physical locations which people use for their daily activities but now has spread through social media into the online realm. Social media platforms display women through a lens that originates from patriarchal societal values. The existing situation creates a pathway which leads to multiple cases of Online Gender Based Violence. Social media algorithms enhance content which depicts women through their physical appearance which leads to increased risk of women experiencing Online Gender Based Violence. The research applies Pierre Bourdieu's theory of symbolic violence which defines hidden violent actions that function through socially accepted symbols and practices and common language. People including the victims themselves develop a false belief that social injustices which occur within their society exist as normal human behavior.

This study will focus on the analysis of gender inequality as reflected in the increasing cases of Online Gender Based Violence on social media. The informants in this study are social media users who have experienced cases of Online Gender Based Violence. The research examines social media platforms which serve as channels for Online Gender Based Violence while analyzing the connection between patriarchal norms and gender inequality to these violent outbreaks. The study will investigate methods that organizations can use to decrease or completely stop Online Gender Based Violence which will enable platforms to create safe environments for all users.

Although research on OGBV has developed in Indonesia, most of it focuses on the legal framework, legal protection, and descriptive explanations of how it occurs in digital spaces. This research focusing on OGBV as a form of symbolic violence manifested by deeply rooted patriarchal culture remains limited. The structural and cultural mechanisms that normalize OGBV have been little discussed. Therefore, the research gap in this study is understanding how OGBV can operate through symbolic violence, internalized in everyday digital interactions, which, if normalized, will maintain gender inequality in Indonesia, particularly in the digital space.

## METHOD

The research used FPAR through its qualitative design to study how women experience Online Gender Based Violence in digital spaces. The researchers chose a qualitative research method because it allows them to observe social interactions which people use to create their personal meanings and life stories while enabling women who experience gender-based violence to share their stories (Creswell & Poth, 2018). FPAR establishes women as research subjects who participate in research through their active role as research participants and change agents of the investigation which maintains participatory and collaborative and reflective research methods to uncover how patriarchal values and power dynamics and symbolic violence operate on digital platforms while the study promotes critical awareness and joint resistance efforts (Cahill et al., 2022; Cornwall & Rivas, 2022; Bailey & Steeves, 2019).

The researcher selected five female informants who experienced Online Gender Based Violence through cyberbullying and doxxing and non-consensual dissemination of intimate content and body shaming and online threats. All informants are active social media users (TikTok, Instagram, and X). The informants' ages ranged from 22 to 28 years, and all informant identities were kept confidential to maintain confidentiality regarding the sensitive research topic, which is feared to lead to informant victimization. The fifth informant was chosen due to the limited number of informants willing to be interviewed, due to the sensitive topic discussed and the ongoing patriarchy in Indonesia, which has resulted in victims' low levels of courage to speak out. Therefore, the researcher had previously contacted eight informants, but three of them subsequently withdrew from the interview, leaving only five informants available. The researcher conducted their study through in-depth interviews which they performed both offline and online while protecting victim safety and maintaining sensitivity to trauma. The researcher conducted their social media content study through digital observation and documentation analysis. The researcher used Miles and Huberman's interactive analysis model to conduct data analysis which consists of three steps namely data reduction and data display and conclusion drawing and verification.

Thematic analysis helped the researcher find essential themes that show gender inequality and power relations and symbolic violence in Online Gender Based Violence practices that occur in digital spaces (Bourdieu, 1990; Sugiyanto, 2021). Triangulation techniques were used in this study to ensure the validity and reliability of the data. First, theoretical triangulation was used, analyzing the findings from the perspective of symbolic violence theory to ensure data conformity with the theoretical framework. Second, informant triangulation was used through interviews involving five informants with diverse backgrounds, ensuring the data mutually confirmed and strengthened the research findings. Subsequently, the researchers drew and verified conclusions through a process of source and technique triangulation to ensure the study's consistency and credibility. Thus, the Miles and Huberman model served as the overall data analysis framework, while thematic analysis was

employed as the analytical technique to generate the themes that formed the basis for interpreting the research data. The research results demonstrate increasing consistency with the theory of symbolic violence. The research uses this specific method to develop scholarly knowledge which supports women empowerment while creating social changes that achieve equal gender rights in digital spaces.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Symbolic Violence in Online Gender Based Violence on Social Media

Bourdieu (1991) defines symbolic violence as a form of power that is hidden behind social norms that support injustice. Symbolic violence presents countless instances in which people or social groups hold power structures as legitimate social norms they must abide by without questioning. The emergence of Online Gender Based Violence through technological progress combines with existing gender norms and stereotypes and societal representations which create gender disparities to establish its presence. The social environment establishes habitus which generates the patterns of behavior and thought that create symbolic violence. Perpetrators of Online Gender Based Violence develop their understanding of these acts as non-serious behavior which they consider jokes although such conduct inflicts severe damage to victims who become vulnerable members of society. This can be seen in the following interview quotation.

*"Oh, I think they just don't realize that, and they just capped it all off with an innocent notion-"Oh, just joking!"; for us, it is quite different." (Informant N)*

The interview quotation with Informant N shows that gender-based harassment is still often perceived by perpetrators as "joking," even though for victims and others, such behavior is deeply offensive. The situation demonstrates how people normalize symbolic violence through their practices of oppression. These actions, which are in fact hurtful, painful, or violate personal boundaries, are still regarded as "normal," "common," or "not serious" by perpetrators and even by society. Victims are compelled to accept these norms and are not given space to resist or protest because of social norms that support the dominance of perpetrators of Online Gender Based Violence.

In addition to habitus, symbolic violence in Online Gender Based Violence is also caused by symbolic capital, which refers to the social status attached to certain symbols, such as gender. In patriarchal societies women become members of a subordinate group through social norms which heightens their vulnerability to violence in both physical spaces and online environments (Sugiyanto, 2021). Women face societal pressure to meet particular standards of behavior and appearance which results in them becoming targets for body shaming and slut shaming and sexist remarks. The current situation reaches a worse state because social media platforms operate as a system that continues to treat women as objects while displaying their bodies and personal stories which results in women facing Online Gender Based Violence. From the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of symbolic violence Online Gender Based Violence functions as a method that empowers gender inequality through digital symbols of authority which society has long treated as normal cultural behavior (Topper, 2001). The following interview quotation provides a clear example of this situation.

*"Yes, I have experienced it. I can give one specific example. There was a case involving an Indonesian female musician whose content focused on singing during a concert in a particular city.*

*However, in the comment section, several perpetrators of Online Gender Based Violence focused on her body, on certain parts of her body..... "(Informant Z)*

The interview quotation shows specifically how Online Gender Based Violence in the form of sexual harassment can occur through comments on social media. The photo of a woman transforms into a sexual harassment tool when attackers make disrespectful comments which exclusively target her physical features. The incident shows that Online Gender Based Violence receives validation through its use of symbolic violence which treats women's bodies as objects that people comment on without any connection to their actual social media content. Bourdieu describes this type of Online Gender Based Violence through his definition of symbolic violence which enables men to maintain their power by treating women as objects who people assess according to their physical characteristics rather than their deeds and achievements.

The problem of Online Gender Based Violence has developed into a social issue which exists because current social norms permit its offenders to consider their actions as non-degrading and non-harmful to women. The research outcomes show that offenders who use laughing emojis after they make offensive statements show their continued practice of diminishing the severity of Online Gender Based Violence on social media platforms while treating it as an everyday event. The study shows that digital spaces function as platforms for symbolic violence because they enable direct harassment while they create an environment which allows Online Gender Based Violence to be treated as minor or amusing. When making the internet a dark place for women for profit, tech companies would allow such content to exist. The process happens when women face sexual objectification through visual representations or spoken words or particular types of identification. The following interview quotation demonstrates how sexual intent creates sexual comments and references.

*"And when she posted it, it did not mean that she wanted to be harassed. Her appearance and her method of communication were the only two elements which attracted my attention to her. But then, people on Twitter, I do not know whether they were joking or not, used words like 'tobrut' and other expressions that clearly pointed toward sexual intentions. That is actually already a form of harassment. "(Informant Z)*

The Informant Z in the interview explained that women post photos on social media to communicate their existence but not to attract attention or face harassment. Internet users show a pattern of viewing women's bodies through sexual objectification according to their public reactions. The term tobrut which contains sexual meanings shows that the culprits use their comments as jokes to demonstrate their belief in patriarchal values which still control modern digital environments. It is sex with a continuum from objects to beings, and women are found at the furthest end being sexual beings and subjects. Social media platforms enable users to perform symbolic violence because they permit such acts to take place without imposing any penalties which would prevent offenders from being held responsible for their actions. Online Gender Based Violence creates a perception of impunity because users can hide their identity on social media platforms which allows them to think they will face no consequences after committing their acts.

*"And second, social media is anonymous, so people can use secondary accounts, or use K-pop photos or anime pictures, which are commonly used for secondary accounts, whether to vent their desires, to insult someone's physical appearance, or to spread inappropriate videos. We rarely see people doing such things with their main accounts; I think they would not dare. In fact, from everything I have mentioned about what happens on social media, almost none of it is done using real accounts; it is always through second accounts. The people from the past already held these*

*Lestari (Online Gender Based Violence as Symbolic Violence:...)*

*ideas which they chose to keep secret because they were restricted by social norms and their environment. The platform of social media allows users to customize their online activities according to their personal preferences. The platform now features active trends which users can explore on Telegram. My first experience with Telegram led to an unknown person requesting me to video chat for sexual purposes without me having their contact details or knowing them. In my view, this is related to anonymity. The existence of social media makes it easier for people who previously would not have thought of doing such things to start following along, and for those who were afraid to become more uninhibited because they can hide behind second accounts."*

*"But on the other hand, there are negative impacts. People are given a free license to leave comments and to put their ideas up for grabs in the comments section. And with anonymity under their belts, some people with evil intent feel mobilized the more to go mess things up."*

Online Gender Based Violence exists because social media platforms enable users to create anonymous profiles which protect their identity that they can use to attack women without facing any social or legal repercussions. The interview quotations show that offenders use multiple methods to create their anonymous identities because they use second accounts which include K-pop and anime profile picture accounts to engage in activities that involve making fun of people's looks and sharing private information and committing sexual harassment through digital platforms. Suler (2004) theory of online disinhibition effect states that people who use the internet without identifying themselves can behave in ways that their society would normally limit. The criminals involved in this matter think that their psychological separation from their victims enables them to carry out their criminal activities without fear of detection. The use of Telegram messaging applications for sexual exploitation activities becomes easier through anonymity because interviews show that unknown users request video call sex (VCS) from others. Anonymity enables social media websites to function as platforms that allow users to express hate and conduct verbal attacks. Social media users have to guard their real identities when using anonymous accounts to ensure better freedom of self-expression on the social media platform.

Social media platforms use their algorithms to display controversial and emotionally intense content because users who wish to maintain their privacy will continue to interact with the platform. Finally, content creators personally benefit from viral popularity due to the major buildup in audience engagement. Hence, perpetrators sometimes choose to produce content that contains symbolic violence, knowing that it is more likely to gain visibility and go viral.

*"It is really the algorithm. The main factor is the algorithm. People who engage in Online Gender Based Violence tend to keep liking the same type of content. For example, if they like content about women, the algorithm will keep showing them women. The opportunity for Online Gender Based Violence then increases, because they will start commenting on women's posts as a result of how their algorithm works. Even a woman who is simply wearing a hijab can become a target, because once her content enters the algorithm of people who are inclined toward Online Gender Based Violence, those users may comment things like 'look how big she is, why is it so revealing,' even when that is actually not the case. But because the algorithm has shaped their thinking, they interpret it that way. In my view, the algorithm is quite frightening."*

Social media algorithms function as a factor which increases Online Gender Based Violence because they enable users to repetitively observe content that displays negative behavioral patterns. The informant described how social media algorithms use users' post liking activities to determine which content to suggest for their viewing. The algorithm shows users more objectifying content when they repeatedly engage with material that displays women as objects. The condition creates

two effects which generate Online Gender Based Violence while existing biases and negative views about women continue to exist. The filter bubble theory developed by Pariser shows how algorithms create personalized environments which limit users to experience only identical opinions. The informant showed how algorithms select hijab-wearing women images for users who prefer particular content. Users' existing thought patterns which include biases lead to verbal harassment through their subsequent comments. The harmful effects of algorithms thus direct users' attention and behavior which increases their support for violent cultural practices.

### **Impacts of Online Gender Based Violence on Victims**

Online Gender Based Violence causes highly harmful effects on victims, psychologically, socially, and economically. Hester et al. (2025) explain that, from a psychological perspective, Online Gender Based Violence victims develop multiple psychological disorders through their experience of harassment. The environment of victims becomes more harmful when their supporters practice victim-blaming instead of providing them support which leads to self-blame and shameful feelings.

*"At first, when I realized what was happening, I felt confused and afraid because I did not understand it, since I had never experienced anything like this in real life. As time went on, I decided not to make it too complicated, so when someone starts acting that way, I block them and report them immediately. Or if it is, for example, a colleague from the workplace, I just ignore it and say, 'Sorry, I am not comfortable with jokes like that,' and I say it directly. I do that because I do not want to spend my emotional energy; my time is more valuable for other things. My feelings are more toward sadness; of course, there is sadness, because as a woman, I never do anything like that, yet people think of us in that way. But since I still have many responsibilities and do not want to overthink it, I try to take it easy. And if I am suddenly added to a VCS group like that, I immediately block it and leave the group; that is all I do." (Informant Z)*

*"I felt disgusted, disgusted with myself. Like, 'Do I really look like a prostitute, that people would treat me like this?' and then I ended up blaming myself" (Informant M)*

The informants described their emotional reactions to Online Gender Based Violence as experiencing confusion and disgust and sadness and fear. At the initial stage, victims experienced fear because they lacked understanding about their current situation. Their efforts to create self-protection methods included the development of social media blocking tools which they used to stop their attackers. The actions which victims take to protect themselves from their situation help them but fail to remove the emotional effects which they experience. Responses such as feelings of disgust and self-blame are psychological effects that victims can experience. Victims may feel that the Online Gender Based Violence they experience is their own fault. This condition is referred to as internalized victim blaming which causes victims to adopt social norms that make them responsible for sexual harassment incidents. The statement "Do I really look like a prostitute" shows how victims start to doubt themselves through the gender stereotypes that make women responsible for their own harassment (Hidayat & Setyanto, 2019).

*"I reached the point of complete inability to act during the moment which I encountered. My entire body experienced a sensation of extreme coldness, which felt like I had been soaked with rainwater. The ongoing traumatic experience made me feel watched by people who existed outside my space. The thoughts I had in my mind were those types of ideas. The process of my thinking started from my belief that I would lose and advanced until I achieved a better understanding of everything. My*

*Lestari (Online Gender Based Violence as Symbolic Violence:...)*

*future actions should follow this pattern whenever the situation repeats itself. I reached a state where I lost all ability to act in that situation. After my personal experience of the event, I first went into a state of freezing before I began to restore my ability to think and function normally. The first thing I did was cut off all contact. I am also not the type of person who confronts someone directly, who shouts or gets angry in public; I cannot do that, so I immediately cut off. At that time, I was actually still hanging out with him and other friends, but after that, because my thoughts and feelings were already very uncomfortable, I completely withdrew."*

Psychologists explain that the human body is designed to store and record all events that occur throughout one's life. When an experience that has never happened before, such as Online Gender Based Violence, makes the body feel unsafe, the brain can undergo a temporary malfunction. The body shows symptoms of a racing heart and dizziness and nausea and physical weakness after someone experiences a freeze response (D'Amore Mental Health 2024). Online Gender Based Violence victims experience psychological trauma which disrupts their daily activities in addition to their physical injuries. The psychological condition develops when a person experiences traumatic events which lead to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms. Victims of Online Gender Based Violence develop psychological effects which result in diminished self-esteem and feelings of shame and increased susceptibility to danger.

The social impact of Online Gender Based Violence on victims results in their isolation because society continues to treat them with negative stigma that follows harassment victims. The victims of Online Gender Based Violence choose to stay silent about their incidents because they worry about receiving judgment and negative labels which Arawinda (2021) describes. As such, the low level of victim support abolishes any motivation whatsoever to report these cases. Online Gender Based Violence creates economic effects which victims have to endure. Online defamation which victims experience through Online Gender Based Violence will create problems for their professional and personal relationships. The harassment victims have endured will make them feel ashamed which will lead to loss of trust from family members and friends and colleagues. The situation will create employment challenges for them while simultaneously disrupting their financial stability. People who experience these incidents will face difficulty finding employment because their altered images harm their professional appearance. Victims of Online Gender Based Violence must pay for several expenses which include psychological counseling and legal costs and other related expenses. People who experience this condition will show a decrease in their ability to work or do their daily tasks. Online Gender Based Violence creates psychological effects which decrease the ability to study or work (Munasaroh, 2022).

### **Impacts of Online Gender-Based Violence on Victims**

Online Gender-Based Violence causes highly harmful effects on victims, psychologically, socially, and economically. Hester et al. (2023) explain that, from a psychological perspective, victims of Online Gender-Based Violence often experience anxiety, stress, depression, trauma, and feelings of shame as a result of the harassment they endure. Feelings of shame, fear, and self-blame frequently overshadow victims, especially when their surrounding environment is unsupportive and instead engages in victim-blaming.

*"At first, when I realized what was happening, I felt confused and afraid because I did not understand it, since I had never experienced anything like this in real life. As time went on, I decided not to make it too complicated, so when someone starts acting that way, I block them and report them immediately. Or if it is, for example, a colleague from the workplace, I just ignore it*

*Lestari (Online Gender Based Violence as Symbolic Violence:...)*

*and say, 'Sorry, I am not comfortable with jokes like that,' and I say it directly. I do that because I do not want to spend my emotional energy; my time is more valuable for other things. My feelings are more toward sadness; of course, there is sadness, because as a woman, I never do anything like that, yet people think of us in that way. But since I still have many responsibilities and do not want to overthink it, I try to take it easy. And if I am suddenly added to a VCS group like that, I immediately block it and leave the group; that is all I do."* (Informant Z)

*"I felt disgusted, disgusted with myself. Like, 'Do I really look like a prostitute, that people would treat me like this?' and then I ended up blaming myself"* (Informant M)

The informants explained that when experiencing Online Gender-Based Violence, they felt emotions such as confusion, disgust, sadness, and fear. At the initial stage, victims felt afraid because they did not understand what was happening to them. Over time, they attempted to develop self-protection mechanisms, such as blocking the perpetrators on social media. Although these actions help victims cope with the situation, they do not eliminate the emotional impacts they experience. Responses such as feelings of disgust and self-blame are psychological effects that victims can experience. Victims may feel that the Online Gender-Based Violence they experience is their own fault. This condition is referred to as internalized victim blaming, in which victims internalize social norms that view sexual harassment as the victim's responsibility, leading them to blame themselves. As reflected in the statement "Do I really look like a prostitute," victims begin to doubt themselves, which indicates the impact of gender stereotypes that place the blame on women for the harassment they experience (Hidayat & Setyanto, 2019)

*"At the moment it happened, I really could not do anything; I completely froze. My whole body felt chilled, as if drenched in rain. Then there was this continuing trauma; at one point, I even felt as if people outside were looking at me, even though they were not. I had thoughts like that. But as time went on, I started to think not in the sense of giving up, but more like, if something like this happens again, I should be able to respond differently. In the future, if it happens again, I should act like this. But at that moment, I really could not do anything. When it happened to me personally, I froze first, then slowly tried to organize my thoughts again and regain my rationality. The first thing I did was cut off all contact. I am also not the type of person who confronts someone directly, who shouts or gets angry in public; I cannot do that, so I immediately cut off. At that time, I was actually still hanging out with him and other friends, but after that, because my thoughts and feelings were already very uncomfortable, I completely withdrew."*

Psychologists explain that the human body is designed to store and record all events that occur throughout one's life. When an experience that has never happened before, such as Online Gender-Based Violence, makes the body feel unsafe, the brain can undergo a temporary malfunction. As a result, after experiencing a freeze response, the body may feel symptoms such as a racing heart, dizziness, nausea, and physical weakness (D'Amore Mental Health, 2024). In addition to physical trauma, victims of Online Gender-Based Violence also experience psychological trauma that can disrupt their daily lives. This trauma is referred to as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). These psychological impacts can lead to a loss of self-confidence, feelings of shame, and increased vulnerability among victims of Online Gender-Based Violence.

Furthermore, the social impact experienced by victims of Online Gender-Based Violence is a sense of isolation due to the negative stigma that society still attaches to victims of harassment. Fear of being judged and negatively labeled causes many victims of Online Gender-Based Violence to refrain from reporting what has happened to them (Arawinda, 2021). In addition, the level of support for victims remains low, which makes them feel that reporting is futile. Another impact

experienced by victims of Online Gender-Based Violence is economic consequences. When victims experience Online Gender-Based Violence in the form of online defamation, it can affect both their professional relationships and interpersonal relationships. Victims may feel ashamed and lose the trust of people around them, including family members, friends, and colleagues, as a result of the harassment they have experienced. This condition can influence their employment opportunities and economic stability. Damage to reputation caused by the circulation of manipulated images can further reduce victims' chances of obtaining or maintaining employment. In addition, many victims incur financial costs to cope with the impacts of Online Gender-Based Violence, such as expenses for psychological counseling, legal fees during the reporting process, and other related costs. Another long-term impact is a decrease or loss of productivity in daily life. The ability to study or work may be reduced due to the psychological effects of Online Gender-Based Violence (Munasaroh, 2022).

### **Efforts to Reduce and Prevent Online Gender-Based Violence in the Media**

Efforts to prevent Online Gender-Based Violence on social media require a comprehensive approach involving the government, the community, social media users, and social media platforms. At the level of social media platforms, strengthening safety features and providing safe spaces for all users are essential. This is in line with the suggestions expressed by the informants:

*"It seems that these platforms already have policies in place, such as requiring users to provide information like gender, date of birth, and age when registering. This means users are expected to be of appropriate age and to use social media responsibly. In all the applications I use, from the very beginning, there are already features such as reporting tools. For example, on Instagram, when you submit a report, there are many options for the reasons, and sexual harassment has its own specific category."* (Informant R)

In the interview quotation, the informant suggested the need for policies at the initial stage of social media registration, including the provision of personal information such as gender, name, date of birth, and age, to ensure that social media users are of sufficient age and able to use social media wisely. This policy is supported by the theory proposed by Livingstone and Helsper (2007), which emphasizes the importance of clear user identity in creating a safe digital environment. However, in reality, policies regarding age restrictions are considered less effective because age information can be falsified according to users' preferences. Furthermore, the report feature, which allows users to report content, comments, and acts of sexual harassment on social media, can also be used. This reporting feature can help create safer spaces and may encourage victims not to be afraid to report the Online Gender-Based Violence they experience (Oktafiana & Kristiana, 2021). However, the effectiveness of the report feature in reducing Online Gender-Based Violence is still questioned, because even when reports are submitted, firm actions are often not taken by social media platforms against perpetrators. Social media platforms, which are largely driven by capitalist interests, tend to prioritize maintaining large numbers of users rather than imposing sanctions on those who commit Online Gender-Based Violence, as such sanctions may reduce their user base (Gillespie, 2018).

*"Yes, it is about preventing Online Gender-Based Violence. But they will not really do it, because taking such actions would reduce their number of users. In my view, what they have is more of a moral responsibility."* (Informant M)

Furthermore, efforts to address Online Gender-Based Violence can be undertaken by government policymakers, the wider community, and social media users by strengthening digital literacy to create safe spaces for all social media users.

*"There is, actually, that is the digital literacy education program. Digital culture, digital safety, digital ethics, and digital skills. I have written about Online Gender-Based Violence before. So in my view, the government is the one that really needs to be firm if it truly wants to eliminate Online Gender-Based Violence. The main hope lies with the government. Because when it comes only from organizations, even though many feminist groups or Instagram accounts that focus on women have tried to raise awareness, many people still choose not to listen. The only real hope is government programs that can protect women and also some men."* (Informant M)

The informant emphasized the importance of understanding digital literacy, including digital culture, digital ethics, digital skills, and digital safety, in building the capacity of society to face digital advancement. Digital literacy not only increases awareness of the dangers of Online Gender-Based Violence but also helps users to protect themselves, not to be afraid when becoming victims of Online Gender-Based Violence, to report such violence, and to use social media ethically (Setiawan & Atika, 2024). In addition, policymakers can provide community empowerment programs, particularly for women who are more frequently affected by Online Gender-Based Violence. The strengthening of regulations on sexual violence in digital spaces also needs to be reaffirmed and properly enforced, so that these regulations are not merely written policies but are accompanied by firm sanctions for perpetrators of Online Gender-Based Violence. The government plays a crucial role in protecting vulnerable groups, including women, from various forms of gender-based violence that occur both in digital media and in offline settings (Nova & Prathama, 2023).

*"Yes, as I said, we are living in a time when inappropriate jokes are considered funny, even though they are actually forms of harassment. Many people do not realize that it is harassment, or there is no awareness of that culture, because they think, 'Well, everyone else says things like that anyway.' Sometimes cases of harassment are even wrapped in comedy, and what they think is funny gets many likes. That, in my opinion, is one of the things that is very difficult to reduce, because when people like those comments, it means they agree with them. So their way of thinking really needs to be changed. Even if people like this are avoided, there will always be others who think the same way, and then others again. So in my view, it is still very difficult to eliminate. Because when people say, for example, that women should dress modestly or should not go out at night, you cannot put the blame on women like that"* (Informant Z).

The most important effort in addressing Online Gender-Based Violence is changing societal mindsets, which is, of course, not easy to achieve. The informant explained that society still tends to normalize harassment in digital spaces, viewing it as acceptable or merely a joke. Online Gender-Based Violence is often packaged in the form of comedy, which prevents people from recognizing its harmful impact on victims. From a gender theory perspective, this condition is referred to as rape culture, in which sexual harassment is treated as an ordinary or even humorous occurrence, causing perpetrators to feel that their behavior is not wrong (Nurbayani & Wahyuni, 2023). Changing societal mindsets is indeed difficult, but it must still be pursued to address Online Gender-Based Violence. Education about what constitutes Online Gender-Based Violence, its impacts on victims, and the importance of digital literacy that teaches digital ethics and digital safety can help reduce sexually harassing behavior in online media. In addition, the public also needs to be educated to

recognize gender-based harassment itself, even when such harassment is presented in the form of humor.

Furthermore, the culture of victim-blaming in society must also be eliminated. Victims of sexual harassment are often afraid to report their experiences because of flawed reasoning that persists in the community. Victim blaming refers to a phenomenon in which victims are held responsible for what has happened to them, even though the incident did not occur because of their actions (Wulandari & Krisnani, 2020). This attitude of victim blaming causes victims of Online Gender-Based Violence to hesitate to report their cases, as they fear being judged and blamed. Statements that are often encountered in cases of sexual violence, such as “women should not wear revealing clothes” or “women should not go out at night,” create the impression that sexual harassment occurs because of the victim’s actions, thereby shifting blame to the victim and allowing perpetrators to feel that they are not at fault.

Social media, which can have negative impacts by exacerbating Online Gender-Based Violence, can also become a digital platform to counter such violence. Digital campaigns aimed at increasing awareness of Online Gender-Based Violence and its impacts can be shared through social media. Social media enables information to spread quickly and widely, reaching broader audiences and helping create digital spaces that support victims and eliminate the stigma of victim-blaming in society. Social media can also serve as a space for communities and individuals concerned about women’s rights to share educational content on digital literacy, safe and inclusive spaces, ethical use of social media, and the importance of reporting incidents of sexual harassment.

## CONCLUSION

The study showed that Online Gender Based Violence which exists on social media platforms functions as a form of gender-based discrimination which has developed greater complexity through contemporary history. The research which uses Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence demonstrates that sexual violence exists as both direct physical attacks and social norm-based internalization which perpetuates gender discrimination through existing digital societal frameworks. Social media platforms extend digital interaction spaces which allow Online Gender Based Violence to increase by offering multiple channels that enable offenders to execute gender-based violence through both verbal abuse and artificial intelligence-based content distribution. Research shows that Online Gender Based Violence incidents emerge from two primary sources which involve algorithmic systems and user protection through anonymity features. Online Gender Based Violence incidents create three types of impacts which affect victims through psychological and social and economic dimensions. This research is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of studies in the field of gender sociology, particularly in understanding the phenomenon of OGBV through the perspective of symbolic violence. This research is also expected to provide practical contributions through efforts that can be made against OGBV. The government together with social media platforms and the community and social media users need to work together through coordinated efforts which focus on gender equality for effective solutions to OGBV. The research findings will expand understanding of OGBV while providing essential groundwork for developing counter strategies and constructing secure digital spaces which enable safe access for all users.

---

## REFERENCES

- Arawinda, S. H. (2021). Perlindungan Hukum Terhadap Perempuan Korban Kekerasan Berbasis Gender Online di Indonesia. *Jurnal Yustika: Media Hukum Dan Keadilan*, 24(02), 76-90. <https://doi.org/10.24123/yustika.v24i02.4599>
- Bailey, J., & Steeves, V. (2019). *eGirls, eCitizens: Putting Technology, Theory and Policy into Dialogue with Girls' and Young Women's Voices*. University of Ottawa Press.
- Bardall, G. (2020). Symbolic violence as a form of violence against women in politics: a critical examination. *Revista mexicana de ciencias políticas y sociales*, 65(238), 379-389. <https://doi.org/10.22201/fcpys.2448492xe.2020.238.68152>
- Bourdieu, P. (1990). *In other words: Essays toward a reflexive sociology*. Stanford University Press.
- Cahill, C., Torre, M. E., & Fine, M. (2022). *Youth-led Participatory Action Research: Transforming Inquiry with and for Young People*. Routledge.
- Chaniago, M. H., & Arifin, M. (2023). Kekerasan Simbolik Berbasis Gender di Media Sosial. *eJournal Pembangunan Sosial*, 11(4), 35-49. Retrieved from [https://ejournal.ps.fisip-unmul.ac.id/site/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Jurnal%20Muhammad%20Hafid%20Chaniago%201802035018%20\(10-20-23-07-51-31\).pdf](https://ejournal.ps.fisip-unmul.ac.id/site/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Jurnal%20Muhammad%20Hafid%20Chaniago%201802035018%20(10-20-23-07-51-31).pdf)
- Collins, P. H. (2022). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. Routledge.
- Cornwall, A., & Rivas, A. M. (2022) From Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment to Global Justice: Reclaiming a Transformative Agenda for gender and development. *Third World Quarterly*, 43(1), 28-45. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2015.1013341>
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches (4th ed.)*. Sage Publications
- D'Amore Mental Health. (2024). *How trauma is stored in the body*. Retrieved December 15, 2024, from <https://damorementalhealth.com/resources/how-trauma-is-stored-in-the-body/>
- Fernández, E. G., Bedía, R. C., & Cerdá, M. E. (2016). The media and the symbolic violence against women. *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 71, 818-832. DOI: 10.4185/RLCS-2016-1122en
- Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*. Colin Gordon ed. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Gramsci, A. (2020). *Selections from the prison notebooks*. In *The applied theatre reader*. Routledge.
- Hester, M., Williamson, E., Eisenstadt, N., Abrahams, H., Aghtaie, N., Bates, L., ... & Mulvihill, N. (2025). What is justice? Perspectives of victims-survivors of gender-based violence. *Violence against women*, 31(2), 570-597. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10778012231214772>
- Hidayat, A., & Setyanto, Y. (2019). Fenomena catcalling sebagai bentuk pelecehan seksual secara verbal terhadap perempuan di Jakarta. *Koneksi*, 3(2), 485-492. <https://doi.org/10.24912/kn.v3i2.6487>
- Kusuma, E., & Arum, N. S. (2019). Memahami dan menyikapi kekerasan berbasis gender online. Panduan Materi, SAFEnet.
- Mardiasih, K. (2024). *Luka-Luka Linimasa*. Jakarta: akhirpekan.press

- 
- Munasaroh, A. (2022). Problematika kekerasan berbasis Gender dan Pencapaian Gender equality dalam Sustainable development Goals di indonesia. *IJouGS: Indonesian Journal of Gender Studies*, 3(1), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.21154/ijougs.v3i1.3524>
- Noble, S. U. (2018). *Algorithms of oppression: How search engines reinforce racism*. In *Algorithms of oppression*. New York university press.
- Rao, B. N., & Kalyani, V. (2022). A study on positive and negative effects of social media on society. *Journal of Science & Technology (JST)*, 7(10), 46-54. <https://doi.org/10.46243/jst.2022.v7.i10.pp46-54>
- Riskiyah, F., & Al-Uyun, D. (2022). Resistance of Women Survivors of Sexual Violence in Social Media. *Palastren: Jurnal Studi Gender*, 15(2), 177-202.
- Wulan, E. P. S. (2022). *Bahasa dan Kekuasaan dalam Indonesia Kontemporer: Sebuah Analisis dalam Perspektif Strukturalisme Pierre Bourdieu*. *JlIP-Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Pendidikan*, 5(5), 1522-1524.
- Sugiyanto, O. (2021). Perempuan dan Revenge Porn: Konstruksi Sosial Terhadap Perempuan Indonesia dari Perspektif Viktimologi. *Jurnal Wanita Dan Keluarga*, 2(1), 22-31. <https://doi.org/10.22146/jwk.2240>
- Topper, K. (2002). Not So Trifling Nuances: Pierre Bourdieu, Symbolic Violence, and the Perversions of Democracy. *Constellations: An International Journal of Critical & Democratic Theory*, 8(1). <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.00214>